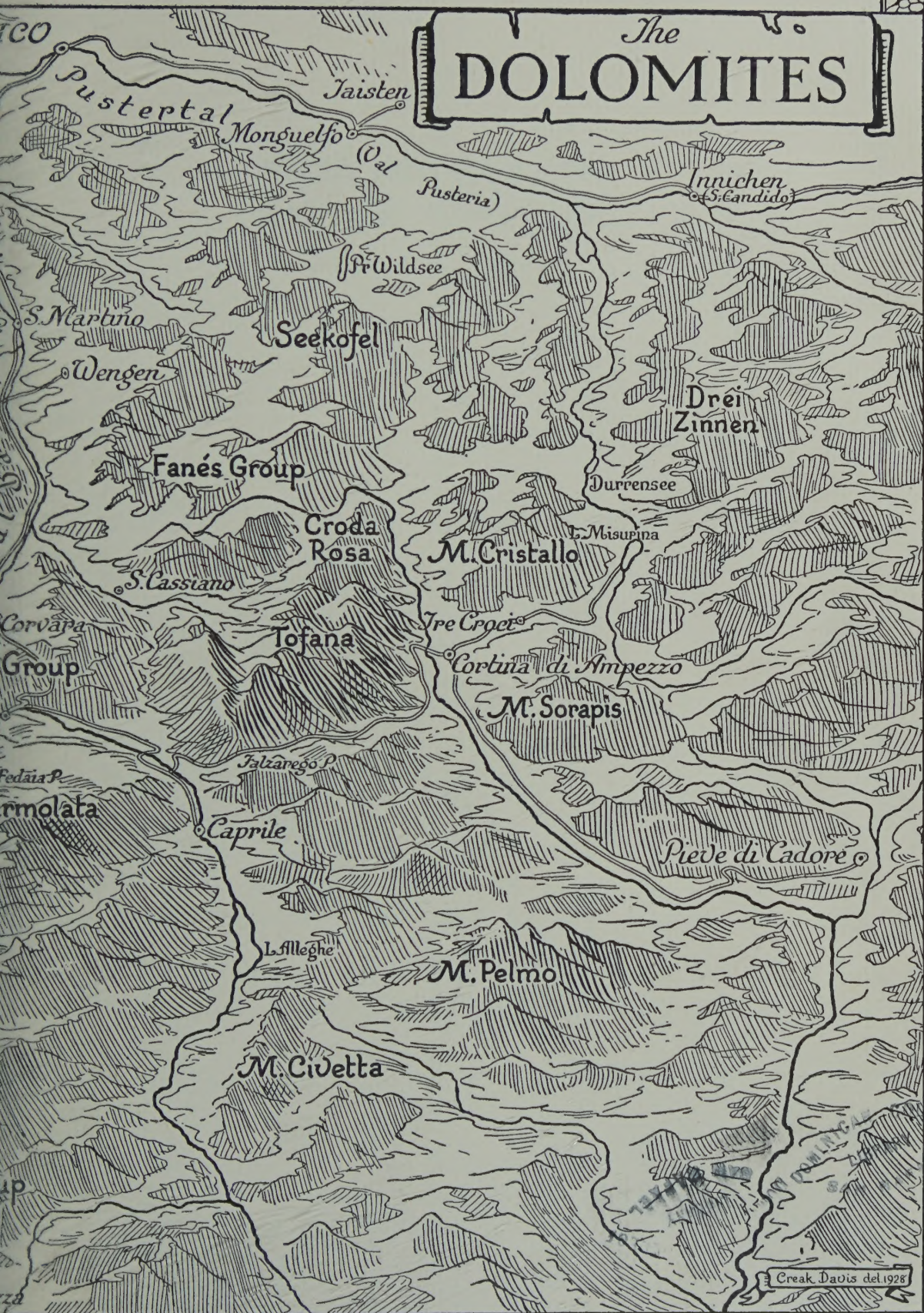




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 Peaks & frescoes : a study
 of the Dolomites

The DOLOMITES



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THE LAST CHURCH IN THE VALLEY

^{Sadrey}
ARTHUR McDOWALL
1877-1933

PEAKS & FRESCOES

A STUDY OF THE DOLOMITES

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM LINO-CUTS BY

MARY McDOWALL



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PREFACE

ALTHOUGH THE DOLOMITES are a mountain region of the sort which most of us are disposed to like, fewer English people visit it, except perhaps in tourist batches, than might be imagined from books and advertisements. Those who do probably miss a good many things which are seldom or never mentioned in the books. This may be the excuse for one that tells of things seen by the writer and the artist during several summers there, spent mostly in the Tyrolese and Ladine parts. You are only really in the country when you get away from the one or two 'centres' to the smaller places. Then, besides the surprise and splendour in the mountains, you find out the charm of the people and of a life which seems to match and yet vary the nature of the hills, and has a tradition of its own in all the things that have been made for use or ornament or worship. A natural art, however simple, which has gone on like this for centuries seems worth recording before it vanishes, and to try to do so is one aim of this book. It does not profess to be an exhaustive guide in the matter, though I hope it gives a fair idea of what can be found in the Dolomites. The only full account of all such 'objects' that I know of is Dr. Josef Weingartner's *Die Kunstdenkmäler Südtirols* (Vienna: Oesterreichische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1923); two compact volumes with a host of illustrations—a handbook of amazing diligence and expert knowledge. It does not take in the whole of the Dolomites, but for all the localities it deals with it is a *catalogue raisonné* to which we owe much, for we should have missed many things and clues without it. Nothing, however, is described in these pages that we have not seen for ourselves; and things have often been noted for more frivolous reasons than the expert's. The illustrations count for as much, at least, as the text, as they may convey at a glance something of the spirit of the Dolomite life.

ARTHUR MCDOWALL

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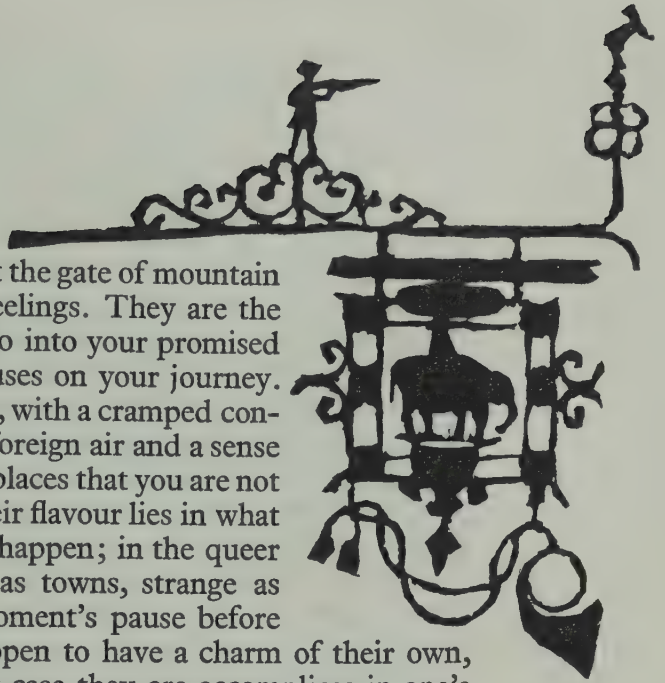
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I. AT BRIXEN

TOWNS WHICH lie on the skirts or at the gate of mountain countries inspire a peculiar set of feelings. They are the casting-off places from which you go into your promised land and often they are the first pauses on your journey. The train scurries on and leaves you, with a cramped consciousness that can unfold at last to foreign air and a sense of holiday. It is the essence of these places that you are not obliged to like them. So much of their flavour lies in what has happened and what is going to happen; in the queer mixture that makes them familiar as towns, strange as foreign towns, and fleeting as a moment's pause before something much better. If they happen to have a charm of their own, it is a pure gain thrown in. In any case they are accomplices in one's dream, giving a last savour to the prospect and conniving at the secrets of the unknown.

By whichever way you come to the Dolomites, whether from Innsbruck or Venice or Verona, there are towns that can be rested in and also have an individuality of their own; and the most seductive of these is Bolzano. Innsbruck itself, though it lies at some distance from the Dolomites, has the thrill of mountains and, with those snow-sprinkled peaks at the end of its street-vistas, a dramatic air; slightly comic too, with its parade of young and elderly men in leathern 'shorts' and of rucksack-bearing maidens. In other years we had come into the Dolomites from Italy and gravitated usually to Bolzano; and if this time we made for Brixen, it was chiefly because that was the one town on the verge of the region we did not know. Being unknown, and at the shortest of stages from Innsbruck, and possessed of a famous and ancient hostelry which one could not avoid much longer, it was evidently the place to sink down in for a moment and await the two companions whom we had planned to meet.

It is reasonable that I should be asked at this point where and what



AT BRIXEN

Brixen is. It stands as ever in the valley of the Isarco, but its name stands no longer. If you ask for a ticket from the always courteous and competent people of the Italian State Railways in London, you will be reminded that Bressanone is the name of the place to which you wish to go. It is said in Italian now, like all the names of towns and villages in the Dolomites since the victor's hand has closed upon them with an impress which does not mean to be mistaken. And it brings me face to face with a perpetual problem in this book: the question of the naming of places. In the case of some obscure villages it may be impossible to remember the Italian names with which they have been capped, and there are others which for one's imagination refuse to change themselves. So I shall take my way with no pedantic consistency, in fact with a capriciousness that may be irritating. Even as it is, Baedeker takes one way and the post offices take another. But the result in these pages, I hope, will be generally clear. As regards Bressanone-Brixen, I learned the name of Brixen long ago from Meredith's *Vittoria*, which, if ever a novel was, is affectionate to Italy. The luggage-labels from Innsbruck bore no other name, and I propose to keep it here instead of the rushing Latin polysyllable. Like the memory of its old stones, Brixen is rooted in the mind too firmly to be dislodged.

Really we knew nothing of Brixen in advance except that it contained the Elephant. Why an Italian-Tyrolese inn should bear such a name is a mystery that shall be dealt with in a moment. But as a clue to character and comfort and entertainment, there is something to be said for following the bestiary. At Innsbruck, for example, you will not go wrong in visiting the Grey Bear; and unless you are bent upon centrality and luxury at all costs, you may enjoy some of the peace of an eighteenth-century provincial town and the more modest of its architectural effects at the Golden Lamb in Vienna. Yet since the rule is only proved by its exceptions, do not follow it blindly at Chiusa (Clausen), the next town to Brixen. Let no obsolete guide-book praises of the historic interest of *its* Lamb lead you to count on something like the Feathers at Ludlow or the George at Glastonbury. This is an antiquity that has mouldered to the grave; in fact it has ceased to be an inn, and I carried away from its dark stonework only a sense of disappointment and of heavy odours.

But to reach Brixen about tea-time on a hot afternoon and wash away the last sediments of dust and heat in what could only be called an ablu-

tion of tea on the terrace-balcony, was to feel that the present was good and the future illimitably open. The past, also, was visible in that sun and shade and coolness. Above the balcony hung a little effigy of the elephant in tin; a yet smaller huntsman with dogs and chamois surmounting him, as well as some obliterated Austrian blazonry. In the large, in a fading fresco, the beast was painted with memorial verses on the outer wall; in fact his image recurred everywhere with a cherishing fidelity. For this was not merely *an* elephant—the genus vaguely seen—but *the* elephant, an actual creature that once trod earth at Brixen. The first, perhaps, of his kind to approach the Alps since Hannibal's days, he stalked in flesh up the Brenner road, a present from Suleiman the Magnificent to the sportsman-emperor Maximilian. Workers along the field-slopes gazed down at the portentous, patient creature. The townspeople buzzed about him. Here, where four centuries ago the inn was already old, he halted. It was an event not to be effaced, and it changed the name of the house incontinently. The Elephant, in the result, brought fame and fortune to the place for successive dynasties of owners; the names of royalties and serene highnesses in gilt letters over bedroom doors show that it has generally been found inevitable.

The elegances and old richesses within were, however, for afterwards. At the moment it was the hour for a stroll, and we wandered out in that blessed state of irresponsibility and ignorance which I have mentioned. There was nothing we felt bound to look for nor, unless its charm invited, to look at. So with a glance at old gabled houses and their colours of pale rose or green—houses of the north, or at least of that blend of north and south which makes cisalpine Tyrol—we roamed until we came to a passage in a wall. All kinds of secrets may lie at the end of a passage; but I had no inkling that this one would plunge me into a book. For a dim idea of writing about the Dolomites had remained dim because a thread at the start seemed missing. The stones of Brixen may seem a very unlikely place to have picked it up, but round this corner was a treasury of delights and a clue to simpler ones that I had tasted already in the Dolomites.

For at the end of the passage, where one came into the light again and saw slim columns enclosing a little grassy space, was the most remarkable thing in Brixen; and a thing unique, both as a source and an achievement, in these old Tyrolese lands. It was the cloister, patterned with frescoes

in delightful colour. We turned the corner into its broader side and came to a halt at the first impression. Evidently luck had brought us to the right place at the right hour. Every inch of side-wall and vault, ribs and spandrels was alive with colour, precise and yet subdued; the blues and whites, greys and greens prevailing in harmony. A clouded evening light floated in from the sky through the unglazed openings; and in a pool of misty shadow a round, massively squat pillar stood alone, supporting the vault at a further crossing. The painted cloister turned again there, and beyond, on the other side, a passage ran dimly away, with a row of figured tombstones erect on the wall and showing like grey ghosts in the dimness. By the pillar two women—an old creature in brown with crutches, and another whose blue apron matched the blue of the frescoes—were exchanging a word. Somehow, instead of breaking the solitariness they seemed to increase it, as a figure in a lonely landscape does. It was a picture, though only an item in the whole impression.

This at first was simply general, for it was not the light for picking out all the details, although it was precisely the hour to feel the spirit of a place whose work had ended in serenity. It came from the walls, where in fact picture had been joined to picture and pattern to pattern over a century and a half of labour; nearly all the frescoes being bequests from the medieval canons of the place and often bearing a name or portrait of the donor. Each of them had contributed his fragment to the whole design, and his bones had been laid in the grass-plot in the middle. In a place of this sort one may easily feel a crushing weight of the past. But that incubus, to go by my own feeling, simply is absent from the Kreuzgang at Brixen. The vivacity and charm of the paintings conjure it away; and still more the final simplicity of the whole cloister, where a couple of homely red roofs and a quaint belfry-tower are all that suggest the mass of old buildings abutting on it. Yet it is the centre of them all, and one feels it to be a holy place. *Numen inest*. I found before long that those old pieties were not a ghost; the cloister, with all that it meant to say, is still part of the life of the people.

The motive of its paintings is obviously to tell a story. Carried out with a pleasing thoroughness, this is a really complete specimen of those medieval Bibles in colour or stone which preach to the eye and flow with a rich stream of marginal illustrations. The Brixen theologians—Brixen

was always and still is a seat of theology—clearly meant to prove the matter; and the painters found it an apt device for varieties of subject and ingenious patterns. An essential part of the medieval scheme lies in its ‘prefigurements’ from Old Testament story; they provoke spirited analogies and contrasts. So the Virgin Birth is preluded with a whole series of pictures, a *defensorium*—‘the case’, as it were—for the idea, to show what prodigies mere nature can accomplish: an ostrich with its eggs being hatched by the sun, a pelican nourishing its young with its blood, a Capadocian horse drawing in life from the east wind, a lioness wakening her still-born cubs to life by roaring. ‘Cur non Virgo generaret?’—asks the marginal scroll at the end of these undaunted arguments; and echo seems to answer, Why not? The racy touches of nature in these creatures and their backgrounds turn elsewhere, with a medieval realism, to human matters. Here is a coffin being carried out by stalwart bearers to the church. Underneath, two men are zealously digging a grave; ‘whatever men do they will soon be dust’. Or—by way of an admonishment from one of the canons to the holder of the prince-bishopric—there is a contrast of two robed and mitred bishops. One has literally put his hand to the plough and drives a team with the reward of bliss hereafter; the other, a lackadaisical young prelate, nonchalantly flicks a wand over the backs of his animals. All this, one may conclude, spoke very recognizably to the townsfolk of the fifteenth century; and whether they accept it all or not, the cloister is a living thing for their descendants of the twentieth. It happens to be a much-used right of way and one of the most useful short-cuts in Brixen. It is very quiet all the same, except at the two moments of the day when the children rush madly out of school. People go silently through on their business, but one often sees a woman kneeling there, and passers often stop to look at the paintings. That is part of the charm of the cloister.

The frescoes have a charm of their own. In the fifteenth century there was a ‘Brixen school’ of painters. They are anonymous beings grouped round the almost equally shadowy name of Jakob Sunter, and considering how unattractive their pictures seem in the Innsbruck gallery, for example, I was not prepared for anything as good in its kind as these frescoes. It is as if the wall-surface had drawn out a new gift, as well as all the local skill at decoration. Lessons of technique have been learnt

from Italy, and there is a Carpaccio-like flavour in the scene of a young woman who lies in bed, with a window opening on to a landscape outside, while a 'Kalendar', the fabled bird which takes away illnesses at sight, perches in front of her. The Italian spirit seems to come out again in certain slim and graceful figures of angels in the spandrels. But the mass of the frescoes have a character which is not Italian, and the latter half of the fifteenth century is said to be the time when this northern or borderland art asserted itself. There is a lively strength and rhythm about it, both in the large scenes of the Biblical story and in those 'extras' where the Brixeners indulge themselves with legend or fable; as with the mounted and armoured 'Knight of Christ' who finds a tall temptress standing in his way (her blandishments have vanished); or the St. George on a white charger spurring forth with a bishop and a crusader. In nearly all of them there is some bit of decorative design that takes the eye; you see it in the wattled fence drawn so pleasantly round the slumbering disciples in the Agony.

In fact the real decorative triumph of the whole thing is what remains with you. You are at the source, as it were, and large embodiment of that instinct for colour and pattern which flows through all this mountain country into churches, old mansions of the great, and peasants' houses. It is by no means dead now. But the Brixen cloister is an early case and a real masterpiece in the satisfaction it gives of seeing a difficult job well done. For it faced not merely the flat wall but every curve of vault and rib and spandrel, and I doubt if even in Italy there is a space of this kind which the composition and the patterns have dealt with much better. Above all, if one can separate these things, what a pleasure in the mere colour of it. It makes our Gothic cloisters, in reminiscence, seem cold and empty. One thinks of Westminster and the abbey walls once radiant and now dingy. This is one of the places that convert you to the medieval use of colour, where it seems to blossom on the stone and be organic to the purpose of a building.

One looks out between the little columns of the cloister—(perhaps two centuries older than the vault and the paintings)—at the small building with a high-pitched russet roof and naively shaped belfry which seems to gather up the simplicity of the place. And so, in a sense, it does, for this is the old baptistery, the 'Taufkirche zum heiligen Johannes' and the



FASHIONS IN CHURCHES

AT BRIXEN

oldest church in Brixen. This is kept locked; you must get hold of the Domherr of the cathedral, who will courteously show it you. It is an oddly planned building where the shallow choir repeats the breadth of the nave instead of lengthening out beyond it. The effect is that it brings you up to the walls, which is probably what it meant to do, for all their surface is covered again with frescoes. They are mostly older than those in the cloisters, and the church itself is of the eleventh century. In fact, in calling the cloister the real treasure of Brixen I have rather slighted the Taufkirche—the most venerable monument in the town and the scene of a Council or Synod which deposed the great Hildebrand in 1080 and set up an anti-Pope. Brixen, through its prince-bishopric, was to be as closely linked to the Empire as to the Papacy. If one were there alone for a time its spirit and memories might take hold of one's thoughts. But you are not, and it is chiefly a question of noting the frescoes with a perfunctorily appraising eye. Again there is the pleasure of seeing a thoroughly well-covered wall; but on the whole it is inferior to the charm of the cloisters, not only because the problem in the church is less picturesquely exciting but because its frescoes have been ruthlessly and insistently restored, which may be why their feeling is less manifest than their rigidity. There is a fresco on the left wall of the nave which has not been restored and this, half-faded, retains an expressive beauty.

The painting of the Brixen school has radiated into more than one of the white churches dotted up the slopes along the valley, which look sometimes, with a small nave hunched behind the steeple, like little cats. It is all well epitomized in the village of Klerant. The restorer has been less busy there, and the tiny church has a good deal of fresco. It shows what a painter who is by no means great can do if he has the courage of his idiosyncrasy. A belaboured Christ sinking under the cross has the childish and brutal vivacity which the school can evince in such matters; but there is a stroke of originality in concentrating the effect on the white-clad figures of the two thieves who, with handkerchiefs tied over their eyes, move in the main stream of the procession. Those veiled eyes of theirs and the almost stationary pose give a queerly majestic sense of horror, and with the pikes and armoured helms behind make the processional air of the picture. As was proper in the highly feudalized Tyrol, this painter had an evident relish for armour. His next scene, Christ rising from the

tomb, is a better picture with good colour. The Christ, banner in hand, is reminiscent in pose—I suggest no comparison of any other sort—of Piero della Francesca's great figure; but again an unexpected effect is made by something else, in this case the pale grey of the soldiers, or knights as one might call them. There is genuinely a technique in the delicate greys, reducing vizors and greaves to a cobwebby or ghostly fineness, and infusing slumber into the constrained attitudes of the sleepers. I did not extract much from the copious legend of St. Nicholas—the name-saint of the church—but at the side there is a really terrific eructation of Jonah from the whale. In the vitals of the whale rages another conflict between two human figures which I leave to the psycho-analyst.

Coming down off those hill-slopes one sees Brixen below in its river valley, the first opening made by the unruly Isarco as it rushes towards the Adige and the real Italy. From outside the small town looks dusty and does not suggest its hidden charms. What one sees and recalls, to make its identity, are the spire of the Pfarrkirche and the big white walls of the cathedral. The cathedral is august of its kind, and a little surprising; to go into it from the cloisters is a swift change of mental climate. From the painted Middle Ages and the grey tombs of the old bishops you pass suddenly into a rich baroque interior. It has, however, a considerable sedateness. Fervent enthusiasts of baroque may even find it unexciting, for it has none of the drama of movement and rhythm of gesture in which the statuary, at least, of baroque culminates. The three pontiffs on the porch are tranquilly solid. It is the dignity, not the drama of the style, but inside the walls this is really impressive. One has a sense of large space without obstructions, and of a quietly satisfying richness of colour. It is mysterious that the prevailing greens and buffs should harmonize so well, but they do. The planning of the cathedral was the last and greatest achievement of a family or dynasty of Italian builders, the Delaias, who acclimatized themselves in the Tyrol; and it is interesting to find the Italian touch meaning soberness, as compared with the livelier developments which were breaking out then north of the Alps.

If any one craves for something more animated, he has an easy resource; it is only a question of walking a mile or so up the river to Neustift, where there is a startling change. The roomy, red-roofed buildings of the old Augustinian convent, nestling between a turn of the river and low vine-

clad hills, betray nothing at first but a venerable solidness. Unsuspectingly you approach, and are met at the first gateway by the jutting and bedizened fantasy of the Michaelskapelle: a 'high-original, polygonal building' (as my learned guide has it) which dates from the Romanesque but is now so travestied as to be fit only for Olympia or Wembley. In fact anybody who has read Mr. de la Mare's magical story of 'All Hallows', the remote cathedral which is secretly transformed by diabolic powers, may well believe that something sinister has thrown off this as a crude jest at Neustift. But the real contrast to the Dom at Brixen lies farther in. You cross a large outer courtyard with a painted well-house in the middle and arrive, through another gateway, at the church. A massy tower and high-pitched grey roof of speckled tiles are far from preparing you for the inside. For the interior has burst into a perfect riot of rococo. Everything most upsetting, one may fancy, to the tranquillity of monks plays over the ceiling and the walls. This incrustated shower of stucco is like a ballroom for powdered ladies and peruked squires; or still more does it resemble some confectioner's paradise. As a miracle of icing, indeed, the Klosterkirche leaves one stupefied. It is hard to believe that this transformation was effected *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, and not as a joke. I wondered how any one could abstract himself there for a minute; but just as we turned to go away there was a nun, or lay-sister rather, kneeling silent and absorbed at the back of the church. So the confectionery does not matter. In fact this eighteenth-century conception of God as the Great Confectioner is a transition to the sentimentalism of drapery or plaster in modern Roman Catholic interiors. Each fashion expresses a mood. Rococo is much to be preferred in point of art, for after all it is a style and has a gay and unashamed audacity; and Neustift is held to be one of its successes. Yet as I passed in the vestibule the venerable portrait in marble of Prior Steigenberger, who 'renewed and adorned this temple', I could not help feeling the same wonder as to the source of his inspiration which had been roused by the look of the Michaelskapelle.

But, although this amazing church looks as different as possible from the frescoes at Brixen or the painted cupboards in a peasant's house, it gratifies the decorative sense which is a real passion in this people. There are hints and foretastes, as you stray about the corners of Brixen, of many things that repeat themselves in the adjoining mountain country, much

that is still alive to the minds and hands of its inhabitants and has counted in their history. There is a house by the river with paintings on its walls which is a prelude to more fascinating things of its kind in the mountain villages. Opposite, just before you cross the bridge, there is a particularly good bit of eighteenth-century sculpture representing St. John Nepomuk, most popular of saints. Behind him the little street into the town runs back with a variety of gables and porches and jutting windows. They are all devices that may be met with next in some seventeenth-century country-house.

Outside the streets you drift easily from one silent century into another; through the grassy, almost rural-looking yard where old episcopal and heraldic gravestones stand up against church walls—Oswald von Wolkenstein the Minnesinger beside them with his curled beard, defiant and archaic—across the leafy little square in front of the Dom; and so to the bishop's palace with its stretch of lightly moulded stucco. A moat—and even this looks more like the canal in some old garden—alone suggests the days when the prince-bishops hanged offenders just outside the gate and obliged every citizen to watch the executions. But the door across the little bridge is open; and you look in, oblivious of past terrors. The interior is princely, amusing. These old episcopal splendours and diversions have their idiosyncrasies. At Salzburg the bishops built a vast riding-school, carved horses' heads on the palace walls and lined the gardens of their country-house with 'water-works' whose charms or brutal jokes still fascinate the visitor; here at Brixen they lavished themselves on a fabric of arcades and galleries. One above the other rise the galleries, the green and yellow marbles of their pilasters repeating the colour of the cathedral more sharply; while green-grey shrubs below and a host of feudal statuettes niched round the walls give a Gothic or northern touch to the picturesque Baroque-Renaissance mixture. A fine doorway in the smooth central wall, with a good statue of Madonna, has a simpler distinction. In its own singular way the place is handsome, with a richness not so much dilapidated as disused, as though its once potent life had shrunk into a corner. A young cassocked priest, chaplain or secretary, passed along one of the galleries. Somewhere up there, among the rich old rooms, the bishop administers the spiritualities which are all that remain from his principedom.

AT BRIXEN

One can linger pleasantly enough over these things, just as one can also 'see' Brixen in an evening. I was glad that our companions were late and that we did linger, even though Brixen in a warm mid-June is not a place to halt at indefinitely. It grows stuffy when a thunderous heat settles on the valley. But the 'Elephant' is a creature of resources; there are cool and stately landings in the house, and still more there is a garden, unique in my experience of hotel gardens. It has a vast rambling orchard, with meadow grass under the trees, where 'all a summer's day' one can lie in a long chair and survey the peaceable mountains. Certainly one can be happy there for many hours. The only discontent which sooner or later creeps in is that the mountains are too peaceable, being—above the village zone—of that pine-matted type which excludes variety and adventure. If other mountains are vividly in your mind the craving for them grows insistent.

The Dolomites are invisible from Brixen. But on a particularly blazing morning we toiled up the first steep pitch on the west of the valley to walk to Clausen, guessing that on the way we should have sight of them. It is the pleasantest of walks from Brixen: easiness itself when you get your level and all the more enticing if you are not turning back but going on to sleep at Clausen. Soon there were refreshing grassy swards, where gnarled Spanish chestnuts, with corrugated trunks, scattered in a park-like fashion.

Then, through a notch in the hills opposite, the first peaks of the Dolomites shot up into the blue. They were the spires of the Gaisler, not the least abrupt or fantastic of their kind, and all the more vivid that morning because snow glittered still in their crevices. Wonderful, the sense now of something held and yet far away, something utterly different from the ground where we were standing. There was the open, shining mountain world—another world, in its starkness of stone, from the covered heights round Brixen.

Well, we should be close to it to-morrow. For the rest of the morning the way wound through fields, like an English country walk, except that the country flowers positively crowded into denseness. We lunched at Velthurns, where the country mansion of the prince-bishops nestles unobtrusively. No one lives there now. Only school-children from Bolzano, to which town the Schloss has been made over, come and inhabit it for a summer holiday; and so innate is the tidiness of the people that even they leave no ravages.

AT BRIXEN

To-day it was all a sunny loneliness. The rough grass and benches in the little courtyard looked domestic and yet deserted. But inside the empty house what braveries!—half-faded splendours worthy of the prelate who laid the first stone of Velthurns, a cardinal and two prince-bishops in one, as he combined the sees of Trent and Brixen. Bishop Spaur, who finished and inhabited the place, leaves his name and date, 1580, in stone, and his episcopal arms indefinitely repeated over the green tiles of a lordly stove. One roams from room to room of panelled walls and ceilings, each with a frieze of painted scenes running round the top of it. The Italians from Brescia who painted them were masters of a charming play of perspective and cool tones of colour. The climax of stateliness comes with the 'Fürstenzimmer'; the coffered ceiling is enriched with gilt, the Italians depict the wonders of the world, and in a corner is the great stove *par excellence*, which museums can hardly match—eight-sided, with Biblical scenes in blue and white, stripes of milkier blue down the angles, and small lions supporting the whole massive business. I was glad it had been left at Velthurns, and that the bishop still has a noble fellow to it in his study at Brixen.

And so on to Clausen or Chiusa, a slightly decrepit town clinging to a strip of ground between the Isarco and another mountain torrent—they have harassed it sorely—and unable to get away from them because the high crag of Säben monastery comes down behind like a wall. The top of Säben (a bishop's see until Brixen took its place) is worth a last effort on the walk if you care to see, in the church, some seventeenth-century frescoes with the most amusing perspectives. But the buildings on the top are a huddle. Albrecht Dürer once sat on the hill opposite and drew it all. There, in a minute compactness, are the stream-girdled town and the fortress which then topped the crag, while one of his vast mythical women floats through the air. His 'Fortune' bodes no good, and seems to be the Fate of Clausen. But the town still challenges its floods; the old church by the bridge stands fast, and the little Capuchin monastery close by looks almost inviting.

II. THE MOUNTAINS

LET US forget now that towns exist. The plains and outer valleys slide back into blankness. The mountain ring is in front of us, and nothing else matters. The reason for coming lies in these blocks and peaks of stone. Nothing else counts for the moment; and as other things besides mountains have got into this book, let me add that none of them ever counts for so much. The human life in the Dolomites has its enticements, but if it were not for the mountains I should not have found these and I should never have come back. All mountains attract their natural lovers and are both soothing and challenging to modern minds. The peculiarity of the Dolomites, however, is that they do not conform to rules. They are creatures of exception, and that is why the expert lover of mountains is just the person whose feelings about them are hardest to predict. Either he likes them or—though I find it difficult to believe—he does not. If he does like them they will draw him all the more because their character is a rare one.

Indeed their strangeness is the one fact about them for which every one is prepared. All descriptions emphasize it, and perhaps almost too much; but it is their obvious feature and is certainly very real. The quality, however you may define it, is in the lines, the colour, and the whole arrangement of these great rocks of changing tint. That is why they almost invariably and instantly fascinate most people—including some, possibly, to whom nature does not appeal very much. These may find themselves caught before they know it because the mountains are like built and sculptured things. In that sense they are human, and they are also as romantic as you please. But there is no vagueness about them, and they hardly suggest a pillow for endless meditations. On the contrary they are abrupt, detached, and often defiant, and although they have practically none of the terrors and glories of the snow-world they look as if they had impenetrable fangs of their own. These will be their chief attraction for the rock-climber. I who write this chapter am no climber, as will probably

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be clear enough by the end of it. I look at the Dolomites from a walker's point of view, and it should be said at once that in spite of their audacities they are far more indulgent to this attitude than they may seem to be. They do not always restrict you to the simple alternative of the top or the bottom. Their barriers fall, they admit you to the middle, and in this way there are no mountains of such wild abruptness which so willingly give up the keys of their strange world.

It was a last piece of good fortune, and not the least singular thing in their destiny, that gave them their name. It is odd to think that this is no older than the nineteenth century. There is a remote solemnity in the name of the Dolomites which calls up primitive ages. They might have been one of the tribes whose blood was spilt by Israel; like the Ammonites—which word denotes both a tribe and a mineral. Dolomite, merely a mineral, but so apt a word for the mountains in its strength and its melody, owes its designation to Monsieur de Dolomieu. Again one thinks how fortunate the mountains were! They might have been the Klopstocks or the Sidebottoms. As it is, the name seems so final that nature has swallowed up its origin, and scarce one person in a hundred who has heard of the Dolomites knows that this gentleman-chemist existed. For a man of science Dolomieu had an eventful career. He was a Knight of Malta, killed some one in a duel at eighteen, was condemned to death, pardoned, and became a cavalry officer. Then he turned from arms to science, weathered the Revolution, became famous, and was one of the savants who followed Napoleon to the Pyramids. He was taken prisoner by the Neapolitans and his release is said to have been one of the first things for which Napoleon stipulated in the terms dictated after Marengo. At some time or other he found out what carbonized limestone was. And so, though forgotten except in encyclopedias, he survives in the rocks; and surely no man of science could wish for an immortality more massive than to have a family of mountains called by his name.

But he has kept us on the threshold and it is time to go in. There are various ways into the Dolomites, according to one's starting-point. The line from Venice takes you to Cortina and plants you at the foot of mountains which are among the highest and handsomest, but not so 'Dolomitish' as some others. This route has its fascinations, but the great road from Bolzano—whether you have come by Innsbruck or Verona—is a

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better entry; skirting the pinnacles of the Rosengarten, breasting the cliffs of the Sella, and on a clear day unfolding a view of almost everything from the top of Pordoi pass.

For suddenness, some lesser ways may be better still. On a cloudy June evening, after the doings of the last chapter, we came up into the mountains by the Val Gardena. The car screwed through a narrow opening, kept company with the down-rushing stream through a corridor of woods, and then reaching open slopes in the widening valley, met villages and left St. Ulrich—the home of toy-makers and image-carvers—behind. But where are the Dolomites? We had ten miles or so of expectancy, with the clouds growing wintrier and settling like bolsters on the hills. Then as their white-grey parted a little, a great dark-grey pillar loomed above the slopes, out of the cloud. It was the side of Langkofel, betrayed for a moment; and then in front the ramparts of the Sella suddenly walled off the valley—the cliffs in their sullen grey of storm-weather and the summits a dead white of snow.

It was a glimpse, out of the weather, of two sharply characterized things. The suddenness of Langkofel, visioned among clouds, remains even when one sees it clear. It is an extreme case, as it were, of how the Dolomites behave. On the top of a green alp there abruptly rises a stone mountain, with just a length of shale or scree between them. The contrast may not be as complete as it seems; in fact a friend who had long climbed in the Alps observed on seeing the Dolomites for the first time how many of the smaller hills looked as if they had been on the point of breaking out as 'dolomites' like the peaks above. It is the rock-like nature of them all. But there remains the difference between the achieved thing and the embryo. And when you have the stone peak on the green shoulder it is a difference of two worlds. The stone is rooted in the world below, is part of it, but it makes a high world of its own.

To say where a big mountain begins and ends is often a puzzle. How many of the greatest Alpine peaks are horns or snow-crests protruding from a sort of high-hung tableland which seems common to them all. In the Dolomites the whole form is perfectly distinct, but the imagination is left with a game to play. You mount the slopes, two or three thousand feet above the valley-level, and are in front of a huge naked rock. It is hard to realize that this stony mass, the top of which looks so incredibly



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close on a brilliant morning or afternoon, may be as high in itself as the whole height of Snowdon from the sea-level. What, then, is the mountain? Is it the final mass of stone, or is it this *plus* the long green shoulder, or is it the number of feet in the guide-book? The Dolomites, at any rate, put all the cards on the table and you can choose.

Langkofel is a particularly vivid case. The late Reginald Farrer, who was nearly as perceptive of mountains as of flowers, likened it to a statue without a pedestal, while the Sella, opposite, was a pedestal without a statue. Unlike many epigrams, this is very nearly all true, though in one vital fraction it is not. A mountain like Langkofel is a detached and astonishing creation and resembles a work of art. The great pillared rock with its satellites—one of which, the Fünffingerspitze, famous among climbers, pictures its character in its name—rises apparently from nothing in a sweep of soaring stone. But, as with other Dolomites, the pedestal only seems missing because you are close up to the figure. Stand at the top of the Gardena pass, where there is a real perspective, and the mountain gathers its far-flung roots out of the shadows of the valley—the valley which is its base. And so it is, perhaps, even with those wild spires and summits of the Rosengarten, all of which stand complete and detached when you are among them. Survey that upper world far off, from where the Pordoi sinks towards it, and the whole tossing range has stretched its long spines down into the valley. The peaks and the limbs of the mountains, after all, are one.

And though the peaks are as different as persons, they grow up, like persons, out of families. The Dolomites are a small tribe of mountains made up of half-a-dozen groups or massifs, planted in a space which has something of the compactness of the English Lakes, though it is larger and different. The variety, the swift changes of view, are like Lakeland. The mountains make fun of the map; in half-a-day's walk you may leave one whole region behind, and unexpected ranges and valleys open before you. It is exciting, rather disordered, perhaps; but what makes the beauty of the Dolomites is just the order within this disorder. Each group has a character, and the individuals which have strayed apart often have more, being rare and independent personalities. They have made a design out of their lives. So it is with Civetta, which Gilbert and Churchill, those first pioneers, rightly declared, I think, the loveliest mountain in the

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Dolomites. The great screen, welded of countless pillars like the pipes of a vast organ, rises in a perfect curve out of a recess of mystery. Beyond it is Pelmo, a sturdy, castled image defiance.

Names of human constructions—towers, ramparts, and so forth—on which one has to draw as metaphors for mountains, apply to the Dolomites with an almost pedestrian accuracy. You cannot help thinking of them as architecture. It is often fantastic and extraordinary, because they are extraordinary; but their wild limestone anticipates man's works. The Drei Zinnen sit on their desolate upland like a bunch of pyramids. The strangest of all the Dolomites, Cimon della Pala, lifts its sky-pointing finger like an obelisk amidst its range. Among the spires and pinnacles of the Rosengarten, which have the added fantasy of colour implied in their name, it is as if some aspiring and tormented impulse had breathed into the stone. To enter their defile is to find oneself walking among the phantasmal backgrounds of Gustave Doré, so eerily dramatic are the possibilities suggested there.

After the thrill of such things one turns to the repose of the constructive masses, for the Dolomites can build great foundations as well as startling peaks. One feels this greatness in Sorapis or the mighty Marmolata, lord of them all, with its snow-field and outer ring of black, jagged crests on one side and the huge precipice, sheer-dropping, on the other. At times, as in the Sella group, it seems as if nature had laid great bases and stopped at that. Here are huge platforms that lie down instead of rising; and the Boé, their chief eminence, is but a hump which is invisible from most places. Monotonous, pointless and ugly—all these epithets may be showered on it. The Sella—or Boé as I like to call it, as a homelier name for an old friend—is certainly not lovely. Yet I find it hard to believe that any one who has seen its pair of bastions at the head of the Fassa valley, or peered up into the grim Val di Mesdi, will not feel a curiosity to look farther in. Escape by the first big step out of that defile—a much easier thing to do than it looks—and even if you go no farther you will be repaid; for on that first storey is a real peak, Pisciadu, and a lonely lake which looks as if only a miracle kept it from brimming over the edge. The mass, in fact, has constructed itself with an art of its own. The steep lower walls are Schlern dolomite; then comes a landing of dolomite sandstone, and above that another storey of 'truncated cones'

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The Boé would not soar, but devoted itself instead to alternate cliffs and slopes.

But within the shapes of the Dolomites, like a spirit transfusing them with life, is their colour. The form and colour blended are what make up for the absence of the snow-splendours of the higher Alps. One may write of their shapes first because they seem the most significant—form and substance, unchanging and essential—but all the time one sees their changing, permeating colour, and cannot think of them without it. Indeed without this colour they would not be Dolomites; it is the living complexion of their limestone. Only this is not at all the simple and lurid thing it is often supposed to be. It was Lord Bryce, I believe, who first gave currency to 'the blood-red peaks of the Dolomites'. They made a purple patch, irresistible and indelible, on one of the pages of his *Holy Roman Empire*, written when this mountaineer and writer and wary statesman was still young.

The picture post cards followed in course of time. We demanded colour and the Dolomites produced something tremendous—rows of peaks in a brick-red blaze with undertints of blue. If they were always like that no one could stay in them for more than twenty-four hours. Actually the vision attempted by the post cards lasts about ten minutes on a fine evening, and leaves one to grapple in despair with the problem of what the mountains look like for the rest of the day. The illustrations in this book do not pretend to give more than a crude statement of it in the terms of their medium.

One may well despair of finding a single phrase that will hold for the changes of mood and moment, the endless delicate variations in the stone. There are the splashes of strong colour—I will not deny them: the deep-red stain like a badge on the brow of Croda Rossa, the rose flush of those many-shaped, many-hued stone flowers of the Rosengarten. Always, when that red flame shows, you feel it has come from the heart of the mountains, but they will not always bare their heart. It hides mostly behind a pale warm surface like a Tanagra figure's, with a patina of grey. Mr. Sydney Lee's admirable painting of the Dolomites in the Tate Gallery shows no tinge of red. A pale terra-cotta filmed over with grey—this you might call the ground colour of the mountains, and for every change of light they will show a change of tone. In the distance they are greyish,

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and on cloudy days they look as if they would always keep the grey of ordinary limestone, deepened under a dark sky by the black water-stains on some precipitous faces. But sunlight is their essence, and as the sun steeps them they are magically changed. Every wave of their surface answers to the light, and now the mountain shows its stretches of pale ochre and rose, with grey here and there like the shreds of a torn veil. All that modulated colour, soft in one place and glittering in another, blends with the shapes of the Dolomites to make them the strange, un-European things they seem to be.

The hidden colouring comes through in unexpected places. Even among those sullen blocks of the Sella there is one face of cliff, looking down on the Val di Mesdi, which in almost all weathers seems to exhale a grey-purple mist or bloom of a delicacy I have seen nowhere else. In all the mountains on a clear evening, when a brilliant day has softened, the white-grey tints of the limestone refine themselves to the last degree. I remember nothing lovelier than a far view of Sorapis on an evening like that. Its mass and every point and feature were defined in the pure, pale-blue clearness. And all, etherealized by the clearness, were the palest ash-colour. The mountain had a transparency which seemed to belong to the air.

After this serene hour there is a pageant, less beautiful because what it shows is not so much beauty as a wild barbaric splendour; yet of all colour sensations in the Dolomites, the most extraordinary. No 'colour-process' or art can reproduce it, for the point is its changing and vital intensity. A little before sunset the air cools and transfers its fires to the mountains. Their ochres burn with this fiery gold. All the rock is gold now, a rugged, glittering, almost incredible ore; yet looking at the western sky one sees the same hue in any golden cloudlets that may be floating there. Soon it crimsones with the red of the vanished sun, and the face of the mountains is like the fabled king's in Villon's ballad,

Vermeille comme une améthyste
Depuis le front jusqu'au menton

—a red all the more strange and garish for its bluish tinge out of the limestone greys. As the light fails, that purple-red fades back into grey and the ruddy embers become ashen. Last phase of all, the ashy grey is purified to white; and the mountains will be white and ghostly still under a bright August moon.

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These transfiguring moments seem like the expression of some intense life of their own. The Dolomites by turns look human and utterly remote. The shapes of art into which they form themselves, the living surfaces of rock that are so tangible, the mingled delicacy and boldness of their colouring all give a feeling that they are near to human life. And then they relapse into the life of mountains; the attitude of indifferent, motionless waiting between earth and sky. The final refreshment that one derives from them comes really out of this uncompromisingness. The peaks and masses outline themselves with a superhuman strength which seems to grow out of an ever-during past and stretch into an unimaginable future. They are permanent, as the restless present of the sea is not; and this stability and unguessed power of theirs is what enlarges and supports one's emotions. Whether they are impregnable or not, it is part of their virtue that they should look so.

In point of fact the Dolomites are accessible mountains, though in saying this I am not thinking of the tops of them. I make the comment from an unambitious point of view, as I said before, leaving the intricate ardours of peaks and needles to the climber. There are summits, of course, up which one can be said to walk, possibly with a final scramble aided by those steel ropes with which the Austrians thoughtfully tamed the easier rocks. But the Dolomites offer a peculiar advantage to those who are content with the first storeys of mountains. It is the possibility of getting into them as well as getting up, which comes partly from their way of forming groups, and still more from their habit of opening into wide recesses and amphitheatres where one is alone with the mountains and screened off from the world.

Still, one must see a mountain from below to see it as a whole, and the big road-passes offer lovely views which can be gained with the minimum of trouble. Indeed motors have reduced this to nothing, although if you are inside them the sensation of rounding a hair-pin bend may be acute enough to overpower higher feelings. Even to watch this process from outside has a distracting fascination. At moments the peace of the road completely vanishes. But in the end, somehow, everything is scaled to its right measure on the passes. Pordoi is great among them, with its grassy saddle and warders of rock on either hand; a gate or rather a roof-top of the Dolomites, so dominating and contrasted are the views from its two edges.

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Then there is Falzarego. Backed by the savage bluffs of the Tofana, it dives with a tremendous drop one way into a shadowy blue-green valley. The whole bulk of the Marmolata lifts from those shadows to its snow-crest; and nothing could divert one's eyes from it but the first sight of the Cortina peaks the other way, and the thought of a land of promise under that long slope of the pass. Third in the triad of famous passes is the Rolle, which some count the best. But having only seen—or rather not seen—it in bad weather, with further sufferings at the inn on the top, I cannot pretend to be quite fair about the Rolle. Its wonder and surprise is the sudden vision of the Cimon needle; and nothing but a clear vision of that can make up for a certain dullness on the Predazzo side.

Then there are the passes which are not quite so famous and frequented—at least by cars. On the Sella it seems almost as natural to walk as to drive; on the Gardena it seems more natural, for the turf is delicious and the road circuitous and new. The Sella is invaluable for its close view of Langkofel, the Gardena for its distant one, and no less for the Boé block, here finely precipitous, and the peaks and pastures of Badia beyond and underneath. But as a walk, and a longer one, the Fedaia excels them, though its peaceful days, alas! are numbered, because a road is being made for cars across its rock and high pasture. Here you are at the very foot of the glacier and glistening snow-field of Marmolata, on a flowery alp from which to contemplate them; and then the way winds down to the old road again, squeezes miraculously through the terrific gorge of Sottoguda—nothing, even in dolomite limestone, 'beetles' more fearfully and romantically than that—and so brings you at last to the pleasant and decidedly Italian villages of Rocca Pietore, Caprile, and Alleghe, with its gay little blue lake under Civetta.

Last in this inventory, but first in height and in adventurous preferences, are those passes where man has never driven, along paths in the stone or over grassy *jochs*, by tracks whose only line is from one marked boulder to another. These are the real ways inside.

The doors of the mountains are ajar. A breach shows in their walls; sometimes a wide bay which narrows as the path zigzags up, or a rent which holds a rough but easy stairway. After that first toil comes freedom again, and space. There is a broad stony plateau, though with enough grass between the sheets of rock for cattle to munch an unlikely herbage.

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Round the rim of the plateau far-distant peaks shoot up as if they were continuous with it. If the pass cleaves through a mountain group it will lead to further recesses. There is one such in the middle of the Fanès, a 'great alp' where sheep feed by hundreds, plentiful in water. Water is always a joy and solace in this limestone country; whether it meets you below in lakes like Misurina or the tinted Dürrensee, or strongly flowing rivers like the Avisio and the Gader; or else high up among the rocks in these sequestered tarns and sources. Here, eight thousand feet up, is a stream which instead of chafing and tumbling like a mountain stream, flows in tranquil bends over the grass like a miniature river, inviting a swimmer to glide down and giving him more than his depth at the corners. Not far above is an enticing little lake; altogether a bather's paradise if the sun is hot enough. A place, at any rate, to stretch oneself in peace. The only neighbours are the tall mountain sheep with their lop ears and soft fleeces; a motley of colour, those—black, grey-speckled, coffee-coloured or ginger. There are places where solitude lays a finger on your lips to keep the discovery of them secret. But I am not seriously alarmed about the Fanès, having walked there for two days at the height of a fine August without meeting anybody. For some reason, though it is near Cortina and has few rivals for rich colour, the group is not and never has been—so the guides say—'fashionable'.

No one would say that about the Rosengarten. Yet the Antermoia Pass will never be overcrowded, and any one who reaches those high places has a right to his satisfactions. That short, steep *col*, one side of which at least, is pretty sure to be in snow, is a brink that neighbours with the crests of mountains. The Vajolet towers and pinnacles lift their shafts close opposite out of a narrow rock-bound passage. On the ridge where you stand, a rose-tinged dome, the highest in all the group, is against your shoulder; and just below on the other side, like a great hill-top room, the last cliffs encircle a plateau. These are the two faces of the Rosengarten, and they might be a condensed expression of the Dolomites. All the fantasy of the mountains is in that procession of splintered peaks and turrets along the Vajolet valley. They are for quick sensations, astonishing and exciting, but one cannot rest in them as one does in the austere calm of the other side. Wild to the point of savageness, this is still a place for contemplation. It is the peace of the desert; a mountain desert of

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rock just vitalized by the rose-flush of its walls and a stretch of living water in the midst of its rocks—the Antermoia lake, pearl of this solitude. There are times when the floor and walls of the plateau are sheeted down under snow, and the lake vanishes. Then the sun blazes full again, picking out the stones of the amphitheatre, deepening the rose of its walls, making the lake a mirror of light. But there is always silence, emptiness, and a crystal purity of air. It is a room of solitude under the very summit of the mountains.

I do not know how many feel a really strong affection to these places. No mountain-lover would be cold to the Antermoia, because it has something absolute, a quintessence of the mountains. But to sing the praises of these high wastes of stone may very possibly invite the comment that one is making a desert and calling it peace. They certainly are deserts, though wild-flowers may spring in them. But there is a peculiar suggestiveness in their desolation. Under a cloudlessly blue sky the bleached stone plateaux might be uplands in Palestine; and elsewhere the reds and ochres, the capricious jutting of the cliffs and bergs call up an imagined Colorado. Such exotic associations rise easily in the Dolomites. But the final spell of their wildernesses is something more intrinsic to mountains—an unearthly calm of silence and bareness, swept utterly clean of the agitations of the world below. Their sheer emptiness is a positive quality. It is a world of rocks, however, and no one will relish it unless he relishes stone for itself, in all its iteration and starkness and outbreaks of savagery. There are chaotic stoneyards in the Dolomites as well as amphitheatres. These are the bones of the mountains; but there is a cleanness in them which, like the clearness of the sky, refines and invigorates; their very hardness braces human bones.

Between the peaks, among the rocks, over the grassy hills below, the paths wind like arteries. Some are of venerable antiquity. One gets a passionate, if critical, affection for paths, a fellow-feeling with their pioneers and wayfarers. The big passes and the grassy tracks are age-old communications from valley to valley. The firmest trodden of the rocky ways lead up to the recesses of pasture; horses, as well as sheep and cows, have been led up and down those stairways. But the paths which concern one's expeditions most are those made by climbers or walkers like oneself—not so much paths as points strung on an imaginary line between them. From

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one boulder blazed with a coloured mark you proceed to the next, and so on. There are some superior minds who resent these accommodations. But every one is really in debt to the 'marked paths', and like most people I feel heartily grateful to the Austrian and German alpinists who laid on their splashes of red and pink and blue with a methodical thoroughness, for the most part. I resent them only when they err or give out utterly—being human. In the high trackless places it is a sport for the eye to range and pick up the next mark; laid, as a rule, unerringly. Yet the marked paths—usually in human regions lower down—are capable of exasperating follies. They will lavish colour in places where not even a blind man could go wrong, where your very boots can feel the path, or it runs between palings. And then at the first doubtful point, a real dividing of the ways, there is nothing—they betray you. Their behaviour, in fact, often cannot be explained or excused. But they remain indispensable.

A sudden revival of faint or flagging marks on a path has its own meaning. Another interest has prompted those lively splashes; there is an inn which wants to attract you. Thanks to this natural impulse I enjoyed the thrill, once and only once, of seeing some one laying the marks on. Not far below the Antermoia a big and venerably bearded figure—well known in the Dolomites—accompanied by a small lad, was thus busily engaged with a large brush and a pail of colour. I had never seen him before, and the significance of his act was not revealed at the moment. In fact the result was that we were led by a line we had not intended, but as it drew us to one of the most hospitable mountain houses in the country there was a happy ending.

Paths and 'refuges' both suffered through the war. Many marks have grown dim and not been renewed; old paths were crossed and entangled with new ones, which lead only to a look-out or gun emplacement, long forsaken. I have learned to beware of promising, substantial-looking paths that are not shown on a good map, as the marked paths are. Some of the club-huts were broken up and some have been abandoned; but practically all the important ones remain and will refresh and house you. Indeed the abundance of these hostels and their supplies is one of the attractions of the Dolomites; they are really little inns of a special kind, and I shall return to them in another chapter. All are in Italian hands now and are called refuges—*rifugi*—of something or other, but the old German

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names, which linger in the guide-books and in people's minds, are much easier to remember. 'Refuges,' however, they are, not merely for the storm-driven, or the climber who is going to scale a peak at dawn next day, but for all who are hungry or thirsty on an expedition. They are affianced, none the less, to particular mountains. In the course of a long walk that began at six in the morning and only ended with darkness we arrived one day at the Franz-Schlütterhütte, which is commodiously large and looks more of an inn than a refuge. It was then early afternoon; but I remember the hardly feigned astonishment with which its guardian heard that we did not propose to stay and climb the Peitlerkofel next morning, but were simply proceeding to the next valley. The slight to his mountain—certainly a good mountain—was too much for him.

But to spend a night in a refuge is something worth doing for its own sake in fine weather. To watch the end of day and wake up to pure morning on the mountains can be the best of all experiences. This is joy in itself, uplifting, glorious and bringing, as nothing else could, new discoveries. One possibility of the mountains I should never quite have believed but for a night like that at the Egererhütte. It was at the end of September, and there was a rather hazardous flavour, as of explorers who may find themselves without supplies, about the whole expedition. After a hot morning's walk we had reached the big hotel on the Pragser-Wildsee far below, only to find it had closed for the season. There were a few servants picnicking still in the annexe: we snatched the last two sausages, by a short head, from a disgusted troop of motorists. And when we left man and roads behind and struck up into the rocky passes under Seekofel it was with a large uncertainty if there would be any shelter at the end of them. Few places in the Dolomites have a wilder or more silent remoteness than this stone corridor of the 'Ofen'. It seems to be, and is, but a passage into the further heart of the wilderness. When you emerge at last on the other slope the 'refuge' (Biella is now its name) looks merely a rather larger, straight cut block among the surrounding limestone boulders. However its flag was flying, though, as we found, over the last of its provisions; for there was no milk next morning, no meat and little bread, and we failed to save the last eggs from being buried in a thick jam omelette in the evening. But there were beds for certain; genial young hosts, a brother and sister; and just enough sustenance to carry us on

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next day round the high cliff-path under Croda Rossa. And all-sufficing at the moment, there was the superbness of the evening. The softest of blue-purples came into the peaks, and faded out of them; and then, as the full moon began to reign, all the stone-strewn plateau shone white in an enchanted radiance. The shingle and slabs of Seekofel, just above, had the clear brilliance of a diamond. Yet even then the light and the air were warm as well as still. That was the last wonder; eight thousand feet up among the crags, on a night when summer was regarded as done with, one slept with one's window wide open and a single light blanket, and before the sun was really alive next morning all the rocks on that high waste were still warm with the glow of the day before. The limestone drinks in the sun and hoards it like a treasure. It stays in the windless air, for of all mountains that I know the Dolomites are the least visited by winds; and unless you insist on a blustering vitality at all costs the combination of peace and pure freshness is attractive.

Let us drop down from the stone on to the grass again. The Dolomites are rocky mountains, but hardly anywhere else among the Alps can there be so many good walks on grass as one gets underneath them. To an English eye, which likes to range over downs and moors, and an English foot, never so light as when on turf, there is an exhilarating freedom in these uplands. It is familiar and yet strange; but for the amazing wealth of the flowers in June or July you might fancy you were on the grass of the downs or among the peats—sometimes—of a northern moorland. Close and springy is the turf when the hay has been carried, and on those highest swards above Corvara I have often had the illusion of downland, until Marmolata heaved her white snow-field above the rim of the green. On the Seiser-alp, which is said to be the most extensive of all Continental 'alps', one may walk for a long time over level fairways and turfey undulations, with peaks in the distance, and the long wall and rhinoceros horn of Schlern for closer company. And for the other side—since these uplands exact their labours—there are the long slopes, the steep green rises by which you gain the top or travel from valley to valley. At times this uphill march seems endless.

The woodlands end below the green passes. Only a few pines are dotted on the top, though the hay-huts still perch and nestle there. Compared to the rocks those green places smile, all the more humanly because one knows

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they are leading to human habitations. Mountains must have valleys, and without the valleys the Dolomites would be shorn of one of their great delights. You aim for them, know they are there, and yet they manage to surprise you. There seems to be no room for any such thing between your grassy *joch* and the ridges and peaks just behind it. But over the top this is magically created; a valley with its streams and pastures and woods, gay with the white houses and churches of tiny villages, stretches underneath. It makes the human charm of the mountains. This cheerful nether-world seems very unlike the upper world of the rocks, but the contrast and nearness of each to the other is a pleasure; and they are united under the clearness of the Dolomite sky, radiant but never hard, and able to blend the play of clouds with its blue lustre.



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THE FIRST time we visited the Dolomites we entered them by a valley where the service of motor-buses was still new. Not long had the old quadruped-*diligence* been 'converted'. It was a road, at least in its earlier part, that was fairly abundant in blind corners and sheer hill-sides. The bus, driving at a lively gallop, treated the corners as if they had been straight lines. We gazed mutely at the warning 'Non parlare al conduttore' while the chauffeur, most of the time, lent back into the car and exchanged brisk repartees with his neighbours. They were all country-people, for this was not one of the 'Atesina' buses which speed tourists across the Dolomites from Bolzano to Cortina. It had a staple local traffic, and we were the first foreigners that summer.

A peasant sitting by us asked us if we 'had fear'. We had. For the first time we knew, at each corner, the sensation of being launched into vacancy where the rocks dropped sheer to a brawling torrent. For a perceptible second we hung there, till the bus swerved with an afterthought on its appointed way. There was, or wasn't, a trump of warning when we were half-way round, and there was sometimes a wagon with a mule-team round the corner. However the miracle of escape repeated itself until the road grew milder, and while its terrors lasted we kept our hearts up with the thought that the driver must have driven this road every day of his life for many years. It was just as well that we only heard on arriving the horrid truth that this was his sixth journey. Yet such was his abandon that a private chauffeur who came later in the bus, and had once driven the winning car in a race from Peking to Paris over Asian deserts, preferred to walk away afterwards over a pass rather than trust himself a second time to that driver. Later in the summer there was a little accident which improved matters, and when our time came to leave we returned in the most perfect decorum. In fact having often travelled that way since, I may add that the service is as efficient and popular as it should be. But

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I record the experience for two reasons: first, because however hardened one may become to speed and precipices and hair-pin bends, motoring in the Dolomites can always rouse a lurking terror; and secondly because the fearless insouciance of the peasants, still new to these headlong engines, struck me as remarkable.

They have no nerves—or they did not seem to have any. Or more probably it was the courage of sheer ignorance. If they felt any thrills they enjoyed them, and nothing spoiled their equanimity. For the rest we travelled, as it were, in a village on the move, and began to take notice as the situation relaxed. There were a good many crates and cases on the top of the bus. Surmounting all, like a pinnacle, was a cradle. When, progressing into the mountains, we came to the first of those shed-like bridges which are roofed with wood against the snow, it was plain that the cradle would stick there; this arrangement would not do. The rearrangement was watched with lively interest by a group of people at the inn beyond the bridge, which was our next stopping-place. It was also to be the resting-place of the cradle. And in the middle of the group, beyond doubt, there was the young woman who would probably have use for it. The cradle was handed down with a good deal of guileless badinage and merriment from both sides; it was all quite open and quite innocent. Indeed an innocent cheerfulness seemed to be the main trait of our passengers. We were among country-folk in an unusually unsophisticated country.

But it was a different country. We had been in Rome and then in the Lombard towns, and now we were in south Tyrol, in one of the Ladine-speaking valleys that are the primitive heart of the Dolomites. Ladine is one of those 'Romansch' vernaculars that crop up here and in Switzerland, in the Engadine, the Grisons and away westwards as far as the Vosges; there is Latin in it, and Italian, and it has come down from a Latin-speaking—some even say an Etruscan—folk. But German has been long rooted as the second language in this valley of the Gader or Badia, and round the northern Dolomites it is the vernacular. All this has been Tyrol, in fact, whatever it may be now. And compared to the people of Italy these folk looked northern, with some of the muteness and uncouthness, in spite of their good-humour, of a northern mountain people. The children, especially the little girls, are decidedly unlike the south. Their

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colouring is different, and they wear so many clothes. As they run up to look at the bus there is something outlandish in their flaxen tightly-plaited heads and the long dresses that come down to their heels. But these do not prevent them from running downhill again with astonishing speed.

To see the physique of the people one must see them as they move. There is freedom in the walk of the men, the easy, lazy-looking stride which is not the slouch and still less the hobble of a lowland peasant, but the flexibility that goes uphill and downhill and has been nursed upon rough ground. Even the women, as they file away from church on Sundays in their long dresses, have a swing and rapidity in their walk which declares them mountain-people.

The looks of the people, which seem northern if you come from the real Italy and tinged with the south if you come from home, are perhaps, like their natures, a blend of the two climes or a variation on the north. So it is at least in the Ladine and German-speaking valleys. There is no particularly decided type of feature; it is the mixture called Tyrolese. If you expect beauty you will be probably disappointed, though you may find it, or something very like it, in the young men. They have a grace and comeliness of feature, something proud and yet gentle in the radiance of their faces and their lithe free movements when they go about in working-clothes. Hardly as much can be said of the girls, who are soon inured to work and have the less favouring share of it; discipline rather than freedom seems printed on their faces, which may be pleasant but are seldom more. Their natures unfold later in the buxom good looks of some of the matrons and the determined countenances of the old women, full of character. But the nobility of the finer southern type with its classical modelling is not to be found, unless it happens to flower in one of the Italian villages.

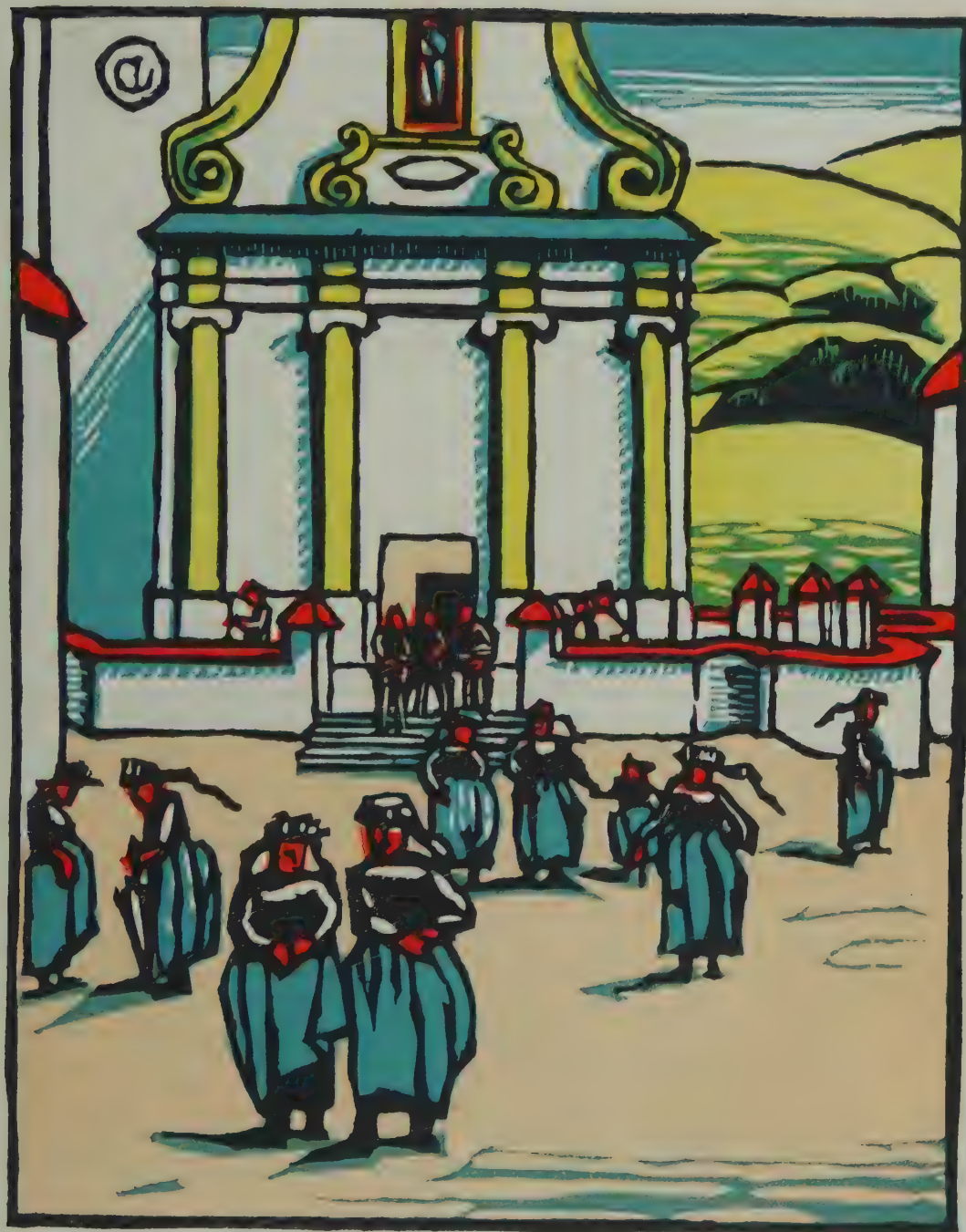
On the other hand, looks and habits in the Dolomites compare very well with those of some of their neighbours over the old Italian frontier. All the possible difference between two mountain districts was borne in on me when I crossed the Stelvio after staying in the Dolomites. Below that mighty pass it was certainly Italy; the faces of the people, the fine dilapidated picturesque of Bormio said as much—yet it was not the generous bloom of the race so much as the rather haunted mien of people clinging to ground where they had been unhappy. Those starved-looking,

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rat-like inhabitants of the upper Valtelline, with their dark hills and shut or ruined churches, were an unimaginable contrast to the freedom and colour of the other region.

To the colour, one might say, of human as well as natural things there—for besides its glow in the mountains the spell of it comes out from of old in the tastes of the people. Love of colour made the frescoes inside and outside the churches, painted gay little decorations round the windows and in the wooden rooms of the houses; and still finds its way, though diminishingly, into the clothes of the peasants. Perhaps it is rather a relief that they do not go in for those peasant costumes which in other parts of Tyrol suggest an elaborate kind of fancy dress. The bits of colour here are simple and homely. But one's eye always rests pleasantly on the blue aprons of the men in the hay-meadows; there is a hint of the mountain sky in them. Then for piquancy there are the jackets with a little chequer-pattern of red and black or red and white in which they sometimes go afield—the rustic originals of those affected by Austrian holiday pedestrians. A man working in his shirt-sleeves will now and then disclose the broad stripes, pink and white, of a really glorious old waist-coat. Sun and weather have brought it to a mellow consistency. It was grievous to find, however, that on my last visit to the Dolomites these enlivening reds had grown fewer. Elsewhere colours in dress have leaped into brilliance since the war; here it seems to have been the opposite. A woman talking to my wife discussed the matter. She examined attentively a little woollen bag that came from Spain, with a prompt interest in the bands of scarlet and blue that were part of its design. This was a familiar pattern to her, for just such alternate rings of red and blue were a popular device, until lately, of Dolomite stockings. But now, since the war, they had gone out of favour for some reason; they were no longer the fashion—'nicht mehr Mode'. She could not tell why it was, and no more can I. Perhaps red has now got a sinister association, or black has come in with the Italian conquest.

The women's chance comes on Sundays. They have to use it with a sabbatical discretion. Black, as age-long country custom decrees, must be the hue of their best dresses. There is something irresistibly Victorian in the tidiness and the style of it, the long black skirts, the full sleeves, the little pork-pie hats, black also, with two long satin streamers pendent.



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That is all one sees from behind, where the children are only to be distinguished from their mothers and grandmothers by size. But in front flash the broad silk aprons, whose colour is as intrinsic a part of the whole uniform as the black hats and dresses. Mostly they are a full, resplendent blue, though for variation some are lilac or brown-gold or silver-grey. Soberly rich, with a shimmering lustre, they are a glorified counterpart of the workaday aprons of the men. Meanwhile the younger men stick a red flower, a carnation or geranium, in their hats, and in their clothes have largely forsaken the black of their fathers.

That glimpse of all the village population after church is one of the sights one remembers in the Dolomites. The women march swiftly off home, chattering as they go; the men gossip in knots and then crowd into the inn for an hour or so; this is the busiest time of the week in the bar. Quiet reigns again after dinner, except perhaps for an intermittent thudding in the skittle-alley. In hay-time, when the people go up in families to the high pastures, the scene becomes lively an hour or two later. It is a busy life, but it has the relish of a picnic. They have changed back into their coloured working clothes, and are off again, trooping merrily, up to the chalets; men and women, boys and girls, with all their paraphernalia of scythes and rakes and provisions; also those indispensable adjuncts, the goats, who behave at these times as if they were more than usually part of the family. There is a halt at the inn and nearly always music, perhaps a dance.

Summer, of course, is a crowded time of work. A lot has to be packed into it; the hay-crop—a rich lower meadow may have three of them—runs on into the corn-harvest. Then the swish of the scythe is the first sound one hears at daybreak—and mowers or reapers will be at work still in the moonlight. But the men and girls bother little about rest or sleep; their liveliness at these times seems unlimited. I was roused one night in a small village by voices singing, and looking out saw a group of men and white-kerchiefed maidens with a lantern, engaged in a nocturnal serenade. They were singing the peasant songs in which the men's and women's voices answer each other. For a bar or two the songs are as solemn as a hymn, and then comes a vivacious burst of harmony with an echo of the herdsmen's calls. Next night and the night after the same singers—a band of harvesters from a village down the valley—renewed their ditties

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in the inn parlour, and after the songs there was dancing to the mandolin and accordion. This, by the bye, is the place to hear what an accordion or 'concertina' can do if it tries. It certainly touches something a long way inside you, and glides on a rhythm of deep intoxicating sounds. The peasants found it as stimulating as usual. They kept on dancing till after one o'clock, and were up again by four.

There must be many such merry evenings in the winter, though I have never seen them. But more than one of the inhabitants has told me that the winter life was *lustig*, in spite of—or perhaps rather because of—the short days and the snow. Snow comes early in the higher places and stays late. The cattle are in stable from October till May, when they begin to take a little outdoor exercise near home. Between those months the men must go out with sledges to get fodder for them from the huts where it has been stored high up. Then there is the fuel to be chopped and piled into those even walls of logs which stand drying in the summer sun and feed the stoves in winter. For the rest of the time they can pursue crafts at home. One friend of mine makes bedsteads and chairs out of the unvarnished pine. For the professional carvers in the Val Gardena summer and winter are one; they turn out toys for all who come and keep up a supply of Madonnas, saints, and altars which even go out to America. Finally, there come the long evenings with drinks and dances—the '*Lust*' or jollity of the season. The mountain villages are not wholly sequestered in the snows; bands of skiers visit them through mid-winter, as the large alps are well-known ski-ing grounds.

Such is the picture from outside. A visitor's impressions are generally broad and sweeping, and I admit that mine are *couleur de rose*. One must allow for the hardships and dangers in a mountain life, the struggle in it and the monotony. Yet my conviction is that the Dolomite peasants are by nature a happy people, as they seem to be. There is no gloom or oppression of the mountains, as there may be in the crushing grandeur and constricted valleys of the highest Alps. The temper of the people visibly shows the contrary. There is a reasonable equality and independence in their lives. Nobody is very rich and nobody is very poor, you will be told; or at most that some are poor but no one need be in want if he will work. Certainly the houses do not suggest destitution. They are abodes mainly of small peasant proprietors; a modestly prospering family owns pastures and

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stock—three or four cows, as many horses, and thirty sheep, perhaps. A rich man will have more and hold a good deal of land. One simple test of the 'distribution of wealth' in its humblest form is to watch the herds returning to a village in the evening. A cow and one or two goats seem to wend—by themselves, of course—to every house, where their owners await them.

It is a peasant democracy, too; there are no land-owning gentlefolk. The peasants have moved a long way from the time when the seigneur ruled them from his hold; for there are castles in the Dolomites, though they are not so peppered with them as the rest of Tyrol, where one fortalice may frown on its crag within arrow-shot of its opposite neighbour. The old country-houses, and the shells of castles sometimes, are mostly occupied by the peasants. There was a fine old house which attracted us in a village near Brunico, and my wife proceeded to sketch it. Once a 'noble' seat, it now belonged to a peasant proprietor. Before long the owner came by; he seemed interested in the sketch, and finally said there was a coat of arms inside which he wanted to have drawn, and would she please come in and draw it. To go in was exactly what we wanted. The outside, as it proved, was the best part; but our friend surprised us by exhibiting room after room stocked with chests and cupboards which he carved in the leisure of the winter. It was evidently his passion; he was a real craftsman and something of an artist. They were good solid pieces, with patterns and scenes in delicate intarsia work. He made no serious attempt to find a market, but he could not stop carving. The coat of arms was a faded heraldic fresco on the landing; from which, not without difficulty, my wife extracted the Moor's head and the lions which were to figure on his next cupboard. They were the blazon of the former owners of the house.

These winter pursuits remind one of Virgil's fortunate husbandmen, with their indoor crafts crowned by mirth and the flowing bowl at night. The poet suspected his countrymen of not knowing how happy they were. And one might easily weave a mountain idyll which the natives would not recognize. But there are those cheerful looks of theirs, and they can certainly be gay as well as cheerful. The real test of contentment is whether people want to change their existence, or spice it, at least with novelties. In the Dolomites, as elsewhere, a certain number of young

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men leave the country for the towns. According to the older folk they are not the ambitious but the lazy ones, who think that life in the towns is less trouble; and it is not denied that to live in the mountains you must work. The real motive may be different, but in any case the drain does not seem very serious; one notices the number of youths in the mountains, as well as their looks. As to the other point, they are quite remarkably unsophisticated. They have kept up their spirits, so far, while ignoring those aids to entertainment with which other people stimulate the emotions and nerves. I have not heard a single gramophone in the Dolomites. Expense can hardly be the reason, for they have pianos. Nor have I observed one cinema in the adjacent towns. It may be fancy, but I like to think that selectiveness of taste has held the peasants to their simpler manners, as to their crafts. Secretly one knows that a change is pretty sure to come. Another year and perhaps the mechanical pleasures will have crept in, but the absence of them hitherto may be worth recording.

The religion of the people counts for a great deal in handing on the tradition of their life and keeping their simple manners. It shows itself as soon as one enters the Dolomites, for there are tokens of it everywhere. The paintings of saints on the houses, innumerable crucifixes of all ages, wayside shrines, frescoes on the outside of the small churches are ubiquitous reminders. It is a symbolical world, inserting itself into the world of the mountains for self-defence and aspiration. And it twines itself into everything the people do. Herdsmen or haymakers, going about their business, vanish for a few minutes into a chapel near the path. As you sit in the inn of an evening the buzz of talk in the neighbouring bar-parlour stops, or rather changes without a pause at the appointed moment into a long prayer repeated by all the men; after which they return to their glasses and the talk goes on again. For these observances are just as marked in the men as in the women, and really more so because one sees them more. The number of men as well as women who flock to church on Sundays and feast-days is amazing, and I imagine that an English country parson would hardly contain himself for envy if he stayed in one of these mountain villages. The attendance survives two long services, one in the morning and another after dinner, though the women are more constant than the men to the last. There have also been the early masses while you sleep. In one village where we stayed many weeks our very

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good friend, the landlady of the inn, seemed to be the only person who was entirely and cheerfully detached from all these things—so much so that we asked her jokingly one day if she ever went to church. It then appeared that she went to mass at five every Sunday morning, and every day of the week in winter when she had less to do. In that mountain village—no great exception to its neighbours—one world seemed to fit into the other with such simplicity that to go back to more sophisticated haunts was like stepping into another age and country.

This tradition still inspires all kinds of homely matters in the mountains. Here for instance, is a handsome new barn with this legend in Italian over the door—‘Be not so anxious for those worldly things which are so vain; labour rather for the life everlasting.’ It is what one might see at home daubed on a gate by some errant revivalist; here it was part of the farm-building. A village near has a pump which is merely the section of a tree-trunk, another massive trunk being hollowed into the water-trough below. The top of this rustic pump, however, is crowned with a head of Christ, well carved and coloured with red and blue folds about the shoulders. It was made in 1910. Nearly all the pumps and troughs have a date on them, and it is as common to find the sacred monogram carved on a stone trough as it is to find the pump topped with a St. Florian.

Under all the custom, the sheer habit, of these external acts there is something more. I doubt if anyone who watches the peasants would deny that the faith in their symbols remains vivid, and expresses itself at times in significant and moving ways. I happened to be in the main village of the Vlnöstal when it was celebrating the Schutzengelfest—‘Guardian Angels’ Day’. A band of musicians, with cock-feathers in their hats, or those tufts which resemble shaving-brushes, was on the scene early. They looked rather comic until they were absorbed into the procession, which was striking. There were many silken banners of all colours, and the effigies of four comely angels borne aloft; the priests and a serried throng of people walked behind to the sonorous music from the band. They marched out of the village to a little flat-topped hill outside. An old spreading tree grew at the side of it, where the banners and musicians grouped themselves; the priests were in the middle and the people stood or knelt round the rim of the hill. In the distance one only saw their attitude and heard the music when it broke in. But the scene was one to

remember; year after year for centuries, you felt, the ritual must have been repeated there.

Naturally there is a good deal of medieval materialism in this religion. Perhaps there were the vestiges of something older still in that ritual on the hill-top. It has been said that the South German peasantry, from whom these south Tyrolese are not far off, are the most superstitious in Europe; and one might use all the saints and shrines in the Dolomites as a text to enlarge on superstition. It is there, no doubt; and the saints here, like Catholic saints elsewhere, have protective virtues such as belonged to the gods of the old Latin pantheon. Especially St. John Nepomuk and St. Florian, of whom there will be more to say. But the matter is not quite so simple as it looks, and it seems to me hard to divide the nearness and reality of these things for the peasant's mind from his general sense of spiritual reality.

Saints, for him, are heroic consecrated beings who can mediate the aloofness, the latent enmity of his mountain world as well as the approach to heaven. A visitor sees the mountains in their summer beauty and tranquillity. A day of rain or snowstorm is forgotten in the cloudless radiance of the next. Nature's turbulence is mostly asleep; but in reserve are held avalanches and the long snows of winter, the sudden swelling of torrents, broken or slippery crags, and falling trees. It is the reverse side of the mountain life; and the story of it, the fatal accidents which men and women have suffered, are told with a graphic impulse on the tablets affixed to the scene of these catastrophes. Nailed to a tree or a log-hut, the rough little paintings on wood depict the disaster with an artless and sometimes comic naïveness, adding name and date and particulars and an entreaty to the passer-by to offer a prayer. It may be the sad end of a woodsman who was himself 'felled by the timber' he was cutting—'beim Holz untergefallen'; and in the realistic sketch a massive tree-trunk is crumpling the unhappy man. Or it may be a death in the snow, as on a tablet which is—or used to be, for last time I failed to find it—nailed to a hut on the Gardena (Grödner) Pass. The story and its moral were in simple Italian and ran thus:

'A sudden death here befell Maddalena Peristi, who as she came from Gardena towards Colfosco, on the way to her home in Livinallongo, met with weather so bad it was like winter, and stopped here. Some good men of Colfosco hastened



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to succour the poor woman, but she was already dead. It happened on October 30, 1849, when she was fifty-two years of age. When and where death awaits you, no one knows.

'Reader, whoever you are that pass where the poor woman halted and died, pray offer a devout Pater and Ave in honour of the Blessed Virgin who helps us in life and defends us in death, and in supplication for this soul who has passed away.'

Above the legend is the small picture. Maddalena, in her red bodice and blue skirt, a doll-like little figure, lies on the snow at the head of the pass, under the crags of the Sella. The Virgin and Child, likewise diminutive and a little faded, appear out of the sky in a golden aura.

All this revives one's sense of the precariousness of things. The longer you stay in the Dolomites the more persuasive its 'superstitions' become. Nature's unaccountable outbreaks seem to require an equally mysterious force to cope with them. The worst scourges of the crops are fierce and sudden hailstorms. These are countered by ringing the church-bells, which is, of course, one of the oldest methods of dealing with the Prince of the Powers of the Air. I had forgotten this when we were awakened one night on our first visit by a furious blast of storm. These tempests are seldom over in a minute; but in a minute or two this one was answered by a clang of bells from the village steeple, and before we had recovered from our astonishment the crash of the storm had ceased. There was another afternoon when a persistent-looking thunderstorm gathered its blackness all down the Val di Fassa and drove us into the church at Vigo for shelter. A man and two boys clattered in soon after, climbed to the tower and set going a vehement peal of bells. Again the storm obediently quieted and we went on our way. I leave it to the reader to decide between a coincidence, an artless science, or a miracle. But I see how conviction will grow, for not only have any instances of the bells failing slipped out of memory; I am persuaded there were none.

Twenty years ago a new priest came to one of the villages mentioned in this chapter, and knowing this vital point in the rural economy he promised his parishioners that there should be no hailstorms while he was there. The villagers are quite clear that there were none. I saw this priest (who has left the village since, to its sorrow) when he came back on a visit, a wrinkled, lean, but charming figure; he might have been a saint and certainly twinkled with a sense of human nature, as his promise

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showed. There has been a deplorable change with his successor. His was a set face that looked askance; he could not prevent hailstorms, and raised storms of other kinds by a fanatical prudery. He was a zealot in the ecclesiastical campaign over female dress in church—'more clothes for women' might be its motto. A youthful visitor who came to a service had sleeves down to the elbow; it was not enough for the priest, who actually dashed water over her so that she fled in misery. Then followed the affair of the inn-keeper's daughter, aged thirteen. She was a nice and virtuous child, who waited on us all at meals with a swift discretion; but she wore a skirt that did not quite cover her knees. The priest, with his fatal eye, marked it down; wrote to the principal of the 'congregation' where the child spent her school-time; and thence suddenly as a bomb came a veritable letter of excommunication. Francesca was forbidden to go to mass, to wear her medals, or to consider herself as anything but a lost sheep for the present. When her parents got to the bottom of the story and protested, there came another letter to explain. It was less blasting, but comically portentous on the matter of costume, advising among other things long skirts for girls because they allowed for growth. At this point the girl's mother was really amused, but the first seeds of distrust and defiance had been sown meanwhile in the victim. The only excuse for these reverend men, besides the zeal of their Church, is that one's eyes are habituated in the Dolomites to ancient fashions.

In this case the priestly informer was no doubt a fanatic. The opinion of the village was that he had no grasp of life and did everything wrong. Probably the priests in the Dolomites are of as many kinds as parsons at home. They may be saintly, they may be stupid, sometimes fanatical; but as they are largely of the same stock as the people it must be rare to find one without a share of common human nature and a sympathy for it. The next village to the fanatic's had a shabby-looking old priest (he it was who rang the bells and routed the storm at night) who was somehow dear to them. 'Ein guter Mann', a kindly neighbour summed him up, and after a pause of appreciation added, 'er trinkt ein bissel Wein'. In the next village to that the priest was a famous fisherman. And no doubt they were the nearer to their flocks through their respective failings or prowess.

It is harder to say how far the people's religion affects their own behaviour—a difficult question to answer in anybody's case. One very seldom

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sees a mountain peasant drunk, though one may see him merry; but this may be due to the strength of his head more than of his virtue. But there is no doubt about the honesty of these mountain-dwellers. It is part of a genuine innocence, like their freedom from crime. The Italian carabinieri were astonished when they first came into the region. There was really nothing for them to do. They have managed, however, to make work since.

There is, perhaps, some laxity in the relations of the young men and girls, and a girl who has 'bachelor children' (an illogical phrase, perhaps, but less absurd than our 'natural') is not shamed. Considering the freedom of the summer life in the meadows it would be rather wonderful if there were no such cases. But one may suppose that the priests do not exert their influence, which is strong, very powerfully in the matter. A satirist even remarked that these early relations were encouraged to see whether a marriage would be fruitful in children. In fact 'trial unions' of this sort, medieval in their origin or even much older, are said to be still practised in remoter parts of Bavaria and Central Germany. Children are needed, at any rate; although when they grow up they may have to wait a long time for their inheritance. This, again, does not make restraint easy.

But the young men in general are a modest-mannered lot. I came across a family of four brothers, each with a fair share of a prospect of worldly goods, who were all unmarried; and though the reason may have been clannishness or care for their old parents, it was said of them that they were too shy to ask for a wife. But as a rule the young men and the girls show a natural easy camaraderie on their way home from work and do not part off into sexes. There is a kind of child-like zest and simplicity in the innocence of the mountaineers. They are not stern natures but genial and easy-going. A busy reformer would call them unprogressive, and say their horizon is very small. All the same, this Arcady of theirs has not been lazy or unexpressive. Those Ladine folk in the heart of it, who can mostly speak two languages, Italian and German, besides their own, have an advantage over the run of country-people, and not less over strangers perplexed between the two tongues and not particularly good at either. And as I hope the pages and illustrations of this book will show, the people have kept up a simple but living tradition in their arts.

But for the moment I would rather think of them simply as pleasant human beings. When you accost them they have the mixture of friendli-

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ness and independence which belongs to mountain folk. But their friendliness can soon grow into friendship, for they are true to themselves and take you as you are.

A NOTE ON THE LADINE LANGUAGE

I used to have the ambition of writing an appendix on the Ladine language, which has been referred to more than once. I feel still that something must be done about it, though this note is shamelessly concocted out of my ignorance for the benefit of those who may know even less. However, I have struggled with the story of St. Genofefa (Geneviève) which was rendered into Ladine in 1878 by Canonico Smid, and said to be the first book printed in the language—‘prum liber blott lading r’vé alla stampa’. A leading inhabitant told me once that—from what he had been told—any one who knew French would understand Ladine in a moment. But French was not one of the three languages he knew. I did once have the illusion that a herd-boy was answering me in French, but as a short-cut to Ladine this is the emptiest of dreams. That half-sentence quoted above about the book—‘prum, &c.’—will show other elements in the mixture. The particle ‘r’ ’ is the most peculiar and interesting feature. The second word, not to say the first two, are plainly Latin; ‘blott’ looks like the German ‘bloss’; and the sentence ends with Italian—probably there was no Ladine word for print or the press. It also shows their affection for the final ‘g’. So they have ‘religiung’, ‘consolaziung’; and the word ‘good’ is transformed into the un-euphonic ‘bung’. Italian remains the nearest clue. ‘Questo’, ‘questa’, ‘quella’ become ‘chese’, ‘chesta’, ‘chella’. ‘Tutta la notte’ is blunted into ‘dutta la noutt’. In spite of this uncouth appearance a Ladine conversation sounds a good deal less harsh and more liquid than it would look in print. But the people say themselves that it will not take you much beyond the most everyday facts and feelings, and hence perhaps comes some of the readiness with which they can express themselves in other tongues.

IV. HOUSES AND CASTLES

THE HOUSES in the Dolomites have a look that one soon recognizes. White, square and many-windowed, they are very distinct as they face across the valleys or scatter up into the mountains. These houses, you may think, are all of them like faces. The many windows are their eyes, forever gazing at the distance. And in a curious way this look of theirs repeats something in the appearance of the mountains. The houses have a mute regard, as mountains always have when seen close at hand; they seem to be looking at you as much as you are looking at them. The expression, shared by both, bridges the contrast between the bare peaks and the houses, whose windows announce that there are a good many lives inside. The Dolomites are 'inhabited' solitudes, as Dorothy Wordsworth might have called them. By contrast with many Alpine regions, the mere number of villages, fractions of villages, and homesteads dotted along the slopes here or curled snugly into the valleys always brings back a feeling of people living in settled habitations. The rocky peaks are austere, the slopes are cheerfully human.

As one explores them one begins to notice distinctions. There are houses half-white and half-brown, with white plaster above and umbered wood below, or bisected from top to bottom by the two colours and substances. The vast, richly weathered barns, the wooden dwellings sprinkled among the others, the piles of logs packed against them all are redolent of fields and forests. The plastered stone houses have their differences. The newer houses are taller, more abundant in windows, less careful of spaces; the older ones have always a good proportion and solidness and may be known by their deep-set windows and generally by paintings or facings on their walls. They have, in one word, a style. But though style tends to vanish there is still a continuity between the old and the new houses; they visibly belong to the same race of people, even if the people are not just as they were. The change of the war, change of government, and above all, that change in the tempo of life of which some spasm reaches even these high valleys, bring the inevitable alterations. To a stranger,

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however, the continuity in the life is much more remarkable, and so, just as one cannot think of the houses apart from the mountains, one does not think of the people apart from their houses.

A chance, perhaps, planted the look of the houses in my mind. On my first stay in the Dolomites I lived for about three months in front of a view, where, although tiny by comparison, they were as conspicuous as the mountains. It sounds the kind of thing that one goes into the mountains to avoid, but it was more of a surprise than a disappointment. Steep stretches, imminent grey peaks and plateaux, the towering mass of the Sella coming down on one side, scaled it all to mountain proportions. And the two little villages, Colfosco and Pescosta, were genuinely rural places; a world away from those on the other side of the pass, which were lavish in hotels and shops and even a toy railway. That was the town, where one went on business or sophisticated pleasure; this, the country. Being the country, it included men and houses as well as mountains. I accepted them as part of the scene and should certainly have missed them if they vanished. The variety and haphazardness of their construction, dark beams, white houses and others, one or two, which had been washed a rich pink (a protective device of the war that remained aesthetically a pleasure) brought interest and contrast.

Meanwhile their windows, gazing across the valley with that air of waiting, might have invited a closer acquaintance. But as a shy stranger, I do not remember penetrating any interiors this time except those of the shoemaker and the tailor (he was also the postman) who made me, for a ridiculous sum, a pair of breeches. From him I learned, as one might guess from the look of them, that a good many of the newer and taller houses were shared out among peasant families as flats.

There was a house, solidly large, that stood out when one looked into the Badia valley. It had the deep-cut windows with patterns round them, the stone-coloured edgings to the white walls that are signs of an older generation. What really gave it an identity was a pleasantly coloured old fresco above the door. Faded rather by time and weather, this was still visibly a Flight into Egypt; Joseph stood meditatively under a palm-tree, and two angels on bended knee were offering a luscious basket of fruit (a thing which nature denies the Dolomites) to the Virgin and Child. We had often stopped to look at it, and coming that way later when we



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were making for the head of the valley we stopped for a drink of milk and a glance at the interior.

We drank in a well-garnished kitchen, and had some general conversation with the woman of the house, whom one of us had known before. Opposite, across the broad flat-vaulted passage, a door opened into the living-room, the *Stube*, large and square with panelled walls and ceiling. All round the wall ran a bench like a window-seat, wide and not too high; one of those ways of seating which people first learned to appreciate in the Middle Ages. Two biggish tables were drawn up to it near the wall, leaving most of the floor empty. There was nothing else, in fact, to take up room except the stove in one corner and two or three chairs round the tables.

The chairs in the Dolomites and Tyrol are worth noticing, as they are individual in their shape and good to sit on. It is surprising how much form can be put into a flat back and seat and four plain legs. And of all hard wooden chairs that I know, without arms, they are the only ones you can sit on for an evening with a measure of comfort. That is because the back, though not broad, has a generous slope; you can 'sit back' in it. The craftsman's fancy plays with its details. There are all kinds of minor varieties in pattern; the back may be shaped like a shield or a heart or an oval, with little heart-shaped openings cut in it, and scalloped edges. The seat is wide and solid, though it rests on four spindly legs which shoot out at bold angles—just right, however, to balance that solid seat and the tilted back above it. These chairs are not easily knocked over, and their form, even when reduced to the last simplicity, is a pleasure to look at. The detail can be refined on at will without altering the principle. In the museum at Innsbruck there is a chair of this type which is as a prince among peasants compared to those simple ones. It stands by itself at the end of a room of pictures, so perfected in age and shape that one's glance travels straight across the floor to fix on it. Bleached to a fine silver-grey, and of a rare smoothness, with the back carved in smooth low relief as the body and wings of a two-headed eagle, the little chair has a lonely nobility.

In this peasant-parlour there were no adornments except flowers in the window, a dim picture or two on the walls, and—most characteristic of all—an eye, the 'eye of God', inserted in grey wood into the middle of the ceiling. Another favourite ceiling-device is a star with long pointed

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rays, a constant ornament in South Tyrol. But as a religious symbol the watching eye, in some form or other, appears in most Dolomite chambers.

On the first-floor landing were some stout old wooden chests and an attractive painted cupboard. As such things go it was young, made some thirty years back; but one of the satisfactions here is that craftsmanship is not obsolete. The patterns, however roughly sketched, have a rhythm and vitality; and the colours which are the main charm of it all—scarlets and blues and whites, paler reds and greens—are clean and gay. The mistress of the house made light of chests and cupboards. They were just peasant's things, she said; well enough here, perhaps, 'but you would never have them in your houses'. In vain we told her that we liked them extremely, and that our house in London was a good deal smaller than her peasant mansion. They were, in fact, much better where they stood, and it would have been useless as well as tactless to 'make an offer' for one. Be sure there was a sound pride under her modesty, besides a sense of natural fitness. No, let the pieces stay where they belong, or if the finer ones are transplanted, let it be to some congenial home like the Volkskunde-Museum in Vienna; which is no dead museum, but a quiet roomy old palace like a country-house in town, and the friendliest of such places. The painted cupboards stand there in high vividness, side by side with their relations from the other old imperial lands.

But we are still on the landing. Our hostess opened a door on the left, and we went into a set of wooden rooms each opening out of the other. These were bedrooms, but in the first two, at any rate, there was plenty of space to live. They had solid old doors, with an armoury of steel locks; but the plainly made rooms were gay with the colour of all the objects on the shelves and walls: holy pictures, painted images of wood, and toys. One of them was brilliant with a little altar at the side, adorned scrupulously with candlesticks and flowers. The sun danced in gleams on the gilt tops of ancestral 'marriage cupboards' or wardrobes—a distinct variety from those which stood on the landing. These others, the modern ones at least, are often plain brown, with gilt or coloured ornament at the top; and always with the woman's full married name, date, and maiden name in clear large letters. Here was one, dated 1866, with an inscription in Italian adjuring you to flee from the vain glories of this world. It was a bold stroke of faith to put that on a wardrobe for one's best dresses. Yet

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no doubt it was all right, for the Sunday uniform was inside; black skirts, black silks and streamers, rich but sober, with no outlet into fantasy unless it were gold thread in the hats or a variety in the lustrous coloured aprons.

If ever the things in a room can be said to live—and some shadowy animation seems to linger in old tables, chairs, and dressers—it must be so in these places. Those cupboards and wardrobes are surely alive, with your past as well as theirs, when the main fact of your history is visibly recorded on them. There was nothing wistful or sentimental about our buxom, middle-aged conductress; but these are the places where one thinks again what Heine thought about old country-folk and their belongings.

‘Still and stationary as the life of these people appears to be, it is a genuine, vital life. The woman, old as stone, who sits opposite the big cupboard, behind the stove, may have sat there for a quarter of a century, and certainly her thoughts and feelings have unfolded in an intimacy with all the corners of that stove and all the carvings on that cupboard. And the cupboard and the stove live because a human being has infused part of her soul into them.’

We went up to the second floor, where a door was opened and showed the only thing in the house that was quite unexpected. This was a chapel, complete with all accessories, a raised and decorated altar, pictures on the wall, and four little pews. The woman only said that they went there and used it when they had time. A private chapel in a peasant’s house, even as rich a house as this, was a surprise. It was less of a surprise, that, being there, it should be so carefully garnished. This would be a point of honour for the sense of religion, of decoration, even the mere sense of tidiness in these people.

You will say, probably, that the house was an exception. It was certainly rich of its kind, and for one which had been in the hands of peasants since it was built a hundred and fifty years ago, not fallen from a higher estate as many do, it was distinguished. But except for the chapel, the features of its interior are more or less repeated in all the older houses and imitated even in the newer. The small houses are like the lesser wines of a great vintage.

We might look at one more, a fair specimen of its kind, in the next village. It was in a group of half-stone, half-wooden houses, whitewashed stone for the base and timber for the upper story. A few wooden stairs

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went up to an open landing outside the first floor, where the rooms were. For social life in most cases begins with the first storey. The ground floor or basement, obscurely dim, serves as shed or stable.

Upstairs, however, there is an out-door life as well as an indoor. In this house the landing at the top of the stairs was an open place where you could sit, and along the front of the house there was a balcony. Those balconies or galleries, with the stairs and 'stoep' outside, give these houses the look of open-air dwellings. And so they can be, with the alternative of a close stove-warmth inside. A good deal of life goes on in the balcony, where ranged in pots there is usually a garden of pelargoniums and petunias. The only objection to the gallery, with its broad overhanging eave, is that it thrusts the windows behind farther back from the light. The living-room here was dim until the sun came into it. But having caught the sun it kept him from midday to sunset, for the mountain houses face to get as much light as possible. In the six dark months of the year they get another illumination from the glitter of the snow outside.

This smallish house had a living-room, kitchen, and two or perhaps three bedrooms. The living-room (there was naturally a good deal of life in the kitchen too) was fair in size, not so large as in the other house, but cheerful and pleasant through the touches of colour in it. The *clou* of these, as it were, was a little pool of colour in the middle of the otherwise plain table; where was painted a circle of clear blue with the sacred monogram (I H S) in the centre and gay red flowerets lining the rim. Much fancy has been spent on diversifying these tables; I have seen one which had the same emblem in the middle, and the knives, forks, and platters of a household depicted in inlay round the sides. But that did not have the colour device. Here the same colours reappeared on the door, which had blue panels, and, instead of flowers, small red birds flitting out of a simple pattern. It was on the little wall-cupboards as well—the same ground of sky blue, a cool Dolomite sky—with touches of scarlet; and even the blue shelves of the dresser had small red rosettes at intervals. The room, in fact, was amusingly true to one innocent idea, and the charm of that was that it did not insist too much. The colours had paled a little and then been retouched, probably with a rougher hand; but they still had a lightness and verve which embellished the place while frankly leaving it what it was—a wooden room.

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Doors and cupboards and dresser all bore their dates, ranging from the middle to the end of the nineteenth century. So it was comparatively a modern room, though nothing in it looked new except one or two cheap colour-prints, which again repeated the liveliness of reds and blues. In essentials it was a real descendant from the age of craftsmanship, all the arts and simplicities of which may be seen in the old peasant-rooms preserved intact in the museum in Bolzano. Museum though it be, there is a complete illusion of life in those old *Bauernstuben*, and they have delightful things. The beamed ceilings and carved cornices, fine old stoves of coloured and moulded glaze, the weapons, locks, and implements are such as one could not see in the house I have been talking about; they belong to an earlier time. The little glass pictures, too, are certainly nicer than those cheap oleographs. But the make of the tables, chairs, and benches remains identical; and, for one detail, the scalloped sides of the dresser and the arrangement of the shelf which held the cups and bowls were precisely the same in my Dolomite peasant's house. The final effect, if one can measure such an intangible, is much the same. There is the general simplicity, the attraction of details, and the pleasantness of those wooden rooms.

Needless to say that in their look and solidness they are as unlike as possible from those thin varnished planks of deal which are our usual notion of the thing. Once shaped, the wood is generally left to itself; the best is cembra. In summer a light fragrance comes out of the panels, softer than the hale resinous smell—the smell of the woods themselves—in the timber stacked outside. One way or another, wood is always close by, various in colour as in scent. The ends of the chopped logs are light brown and golden-yellow. Packed in a tight even mass against the houses, filling the space under the balconies or rising from the ground to the roof like a wall, they may well excite feelings of wild envy in the breast of a foreign visitor.

It is the white-plastered walls, however, that one remembers most, because of the paintings which remain on them, as on the churches. There is still a wealth of frescoes, not really much spoiled, on these old walls. You may come upon one in the corner of a rough mountain village as well as in the populous valleys. But it is in these valleys and their tributaries that there has been most painting. The Val di Fassa has typical frescoes

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of Madonna and the saints, but no monopoly of them; and the characteristic St. Nepomuk reproduced on p. 67 is from a house in the Vilnöstal or Val di Funès, where, as also farther north, there is a good deal of fresco. The paintings on the house-walls are nearly always more primitively vigorous than their date would suggest (mostly early or middle seventeenth century). Besides single pictures there are general house decorations. In Mazzin village, in the Val di Fassa, hidden a few yards from the 'Great Dolomite Road', there is a dilapidated but striking old hostelry, the Osteria del Moro, with a complete scheme of such ornaments, faded though many are; red and yellow facings on the cornices, arabesques and flowers, red and green, round the windows of the front; and at the side a little square tower with painted cornices and green and white patterns above its windows. The date is 1785. A small house farther back had something more recent and curious: a largish fresco in which a procession, with a bishop at the head, was advancing from a church towards a group of halt and lame people in rustic clothes. The Madonna was in the middle of it, with a cripple kneeling on either side. This piece, rough as it was, might almost have come out of a modern picture-show, for it had the simplified weight and vigour which are now in vogue. I was told it had been painted about eighty years ago by the man who then lived there.

The people are still very nimble at their ornaments. A little hotel at S. Cristina was being redecorated while I was staying there. Two workmen from lower down the valley were carrying on the job, and the speed and sureness with which they put on their embellishments, tiny hunting-scenes and 'still-lives', patterns and pilasters, was quite inspiring. It was not a matter of frescoes or high art, but of most simple designs sketched on the plaster; but they were neat and amusing.

There is often little difference at first sight between the handsome peasant houses and those which were built for the local nobility and have come down in the world. There was such a house, fallen from its aristocracy, not far from the first one described in this chapter. It bore the date of 1604, and though its crouching shape showed age it had little distinction outside. A fresco of St. Christopher and St. Florian had been roughly painted in again. The panelled ceilings inside were carved a little deeper; a coat of arms embossed on one of them showed the pride of its past. In a small room upstairs, formerly the chapel, you could still see a faded

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story of the Creation and Paradise, with Adam and Eve emerging from green arbours, above the peasant's bed. Once it had been all painted with fresco. There were stone corridors, with a quaintly irregular vaulting, narrowed between bulging walls.

These houses of the old gentry and nobility, from the simplest kind which are now in peasant hands to the richer sort which have become public property or still belong to great owners from across the frontier, are sprinkled about the western and northern Dolomites and the valleys outside them. The villages near Brunico have some very good examples of such varieties of charm and building in a lesser 'Edelsitz'. The 'Edelsitz' marks itself out, as a rule, by some distinction in the way of loggia or turret or jutting windows at the corner (*Erker*). And sometimes it is called a Schloss. But all these houses, with their outward and inward graces, are obviously pleasant country-houses, of a different and later inspiration than the medieval castle. The genuine castle—the veritable 'Burg'—was a strong tower and house of defence. In its own form this is the authentic and unmistakable Schloss or castle, and even when it has been merged into other buildings it leaves an impress on them.

Of purely medieval strongholds there are not many in the Dolomites, and they are a great deal ruined; but they have at least the interest of strange positions. Andraz, one of the oldest, with a battlemented shell which looks part of its isolated rock, stares out of the past like a lost fragment as you go up the main road to the pass of Falzarego. Wolkenstein, a smaller skeleton, is weirdly pitched on the ledge of a huge dolomite cliff that seems to open into a cavern behind it. The family of the Wolkensteins took their name from this in the thirteenth century; they were the greatest castle-builders in the Dolomites. Theirs was Hauenstein, which is decidedly, and even eerily, the romantic type of ruin. For Hauenstein is a forest castle and a castle of the mountains as well; rising, high and spectral, out of the woods that drift across the great grey shoulder of the Schlern. It was a wondrously apt home for an adventurer and poet like Oswald the Minnesinger. And he evidently felt it was, for he clung to it under threats and duress; and after an extraordinary life of crusades, travels, disappointed love, and harsh imprisonments—which did not prevent him from emerging again at sixty to fight the Turks—he came back to Hauenstein and died there at seventy-six.



6 FISCHBURG CASTLE

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Trostberg, his reputed birthplace, is one of the most complete and interesting castles on the edge of the Dolomites. It is still inhabited by a branch of the Wolkensteins, which takes its name from the castle. Trostberg is conspicuous to travellers on the line from Innsbruck to Bolzano; placed cunningly on a steep spur above Waidbruck (Ponte all' Isarco), it overlooks the Isarco valley and is the key of the narrow entrance to the Val Gardena. We walked there from Clausen one doubtful afternoon, and there was no resisting the castle when it came in sight, though now the day was warm and we, by the time we reached the gate, were warmer. A climb to one of these strongholds induces a genuine pity for the butcher's and the baker's boy or the member of the household who goes down for provisions. And when the visitor is turned away, as has happened to us elsewhere, the discomfiture is total; but here one is kindly let in and Trostberg is well worth the effort. With its towers and outworks, compact and intricate inner quarters, it is a typically complex castle which has passed through all stages from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. You might fancy yourself for a moment in a farm as you enter the big doorway, but you go on to a flight of steps mounting into a high arcaded little court-yard. This is the 'Burghof', with numerous gay coats of arms painted on its walls and a round-arched gallery above; the date is about 1500. The 'Palas', or living-quarters of the castle, lies round it and shows contrasts. A medieval wooden room, with a three-barrelled ceiling and fine carving on the beams, is one of the treasures of the place. Utterly different is the Rittersaal, a long gallery of the seventeenth century, with a panelled roof and engaging stucco decorations, coloured simply, along the walls, where statues of the Wolkenstein ancestors appear in niches. For a final contrast there are the old defensive towers and walls outside, the unchanged simplicity of the kitchens, and the rather constricted neatness of the actual living-rooms, eminently nineteenth-century and German. In fact the interest of Trostberg, for any one who is not an expert in fortifications, lies just in these reflections of the mirror of time and in its general picturesque completeness.

Up that same side-valley of the Gardena, but at the head of it, where the green slopes have widened again and are topped with massive Dolomites, lies another castle, the largest of all that are well within the mountains. This is Fischburg, another Wolkenstein castle, not far from the first eyrie

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of the family in the cliffs beyond. There is nothing defiant about Fischburg, a compact little mass of white walls and red-tiled roofs and turrets nestling comfortably on a green slope. It looks like the castle out of a picture in a fairy-book. Serious books say that it was the last fortified place built on medieval lines in Tyrol. That was in the seventeenth century, when the spirit of the times had changed. A long Latin inscription (not without its flowers) on the outside walls records that 'the dynasts of Wolkenstein' built it as a refuge to which they could retire when exhausted with their military and courtly duties; where they might bring up their children in health of body and mind among green slopes and woodlands. This is almost a modern touch, and the interior certainly suggests amenities. There are two arcaded courts, and a chapel in old stucco; and though the decorations have been much damaged the place is still gay with coloured cornices, flowers and fruits and mermaids painted round the windows; and at least one spirited scene from a fresco of the 'four Continents' survives on the court-yard wall. The castle has suffered badly from time and accidents, and shows traces of fire all over its walls; about a century ago it was converted into an almshouse, and when I saw it last some work-people were the only inhabitants. Such was Fischburg in 1926. But it had passed into the hands of a baronial Italian owner, who was having it briskly renovated. By the time these lines are in print it may be 'restored' completely, though not, it is to be hoped, changed out of likeness.

There is a little castle called Thurn, delightfully placed on a knoll above S. Martino in the Val Badia. The tower, which outlines itself well against neighbouring Dolomites when you are close to it, is the only medieval part; the rest is later in date, and farm-people inhabit the modernized house. In its time, however, it passed from one lordly hand to another and held full justiciary rights; whereas down in the village there is a seventeenth-century residence, now an inn, which must always have been an 'amenity' and nothing more. The low, round-arched stone loggia or arcade in front is still inviting, and a feature that architects might copy.

In fact these old houses, of every sort and size, nearly always have something worth seeing. It may not be such a rarity as we found one day in a deserted tower; where the rooms, one above another, were frescoed with enticing scenes and patterns, including a hunting piece, with small elephants, lions, tigers, and chamois on the several walls, of an almost

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Persian verve and delicacy. But there will probably be something—whether it is a painting or a bit of architectural style on the outside; or a finely panelled room within; or as in an old house at Dietenheim (now an agricultural college) a chapel with pew-heads carved as lions and a hint of Spanish richness and severity blended in its carvings and colour. That is the essence of the old houses. You may group them according to their date and scale and manner, but in the end no two are alike. Each has an idiosyncrasy.



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THE CHIEF fact about the churches in the Dolomites, I suppose, is that they have always been the churches of a religious people. The people are still religious, and that is why there is life in the churches. But the life which one feels in them and the spirit that made them is expressed in a way that makes the churches worth describing for their own sake. The people are devout, and superstitious too, but they are cheerful; and in the churches this temper of theirs has combined with their sense of colour and form to produce a kind of art which is none the less pleasing for being simple. It always has a character, even if it has had to work with limitations.

One need not expect, for instance, to find architectural splendours in the mountain places. They have seldom had money or material for large constructions. These you will see in towns outside the main mountain-block, along the routes of civilization. But in the mountains, buildings only grow imposing where some little town has made a natural centre; and so Cortina has its graceful church, and Innichen (Italianized as S. Candido now) a finer Romanesque one. Even the smaller churches show how different manners have followed each other through the ages. As far as construction goes, perhaps the most individual thing which these Tyrolese churches achieved was the vaulting of their ceilings, where the ribs are netted with a supple ingenuity.

But let us see first what a typical church in the Dolomites looks like. The distance shows a small white building with a tower ending in a little spire or a bulb-shaped steeple. Those bulbs always have something strange and exotic to the eye of a westerner. Even where you meet them first, in the mild South German lands, they look like strayed outposts of the Orient; and as you follow them along the Danube it is to the East, with its cupolas and minarets, that they are leading you. In the mountains, a self-enclosed land, they speak only or chiefly to the eye. Though they are not by any means universal in the Dolomites, being creations of the seventeenth or eighteenth century, there are enough of them to make an

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impression, and it seems appropriate. Their singularity matches the singularity of the mountains. There is no resemblance in shape between the bulbous steeples and any of the fantastic rock-forms into which nature has carved the Dolomites. But in both there is strangeness. The mountains nearly always suggest some effect of architecture, some reminiscence of a design sharply broken off or transmogrified. And in setting up the bulbs against these cliffs and pinnacles it is as though man had replied with a counter-pattern of his own—the plump curve being just what is not found in the rock-lines.

In spite of that, there is a match between them. It is wonderful how the bulbs get into the right places. Largest and liveliest of all is the big one of light green, with tinges of yellow over the copper, on the church at Kastelruth; and this, from the hill-terrace behind where one goes for a view, is sharp-cut against the grey mountain wall of the Schlern. A mile or two away is the little church of St. Valentin near Seis, standing alone, with a loggia and frescoed walls, on a pleasant hill-side. Here there is the same effect when you are near, only that the bulb is dark red this time—the usual complexion. More striking still, because the churches are closer to the rocks, is the effect in the decidedly mountain villages of Colfosco and S. Cassiano. In each there are big cliffs and peaks behind, and in this transparent higher air the steeples are distinct and yet combined with their background. Distances seem effaced and they look part—though a strongly contrasted part—of the mountains.

For one bulb, however, you will see many of the more familiar kind of steeple, which is either an unambitious point or tapers into the thinnest of needles. These, compared with the other sort, look northern, homely, possibly sentimental. Indeed, the mere neatness of the little steeple and white-washed church so far suggest Protestantism that it is odd to find them enclosing the gaiety of a Catholic-Tyrolese interior. But if something sentimental seems to hover about these little mountain spires it is a pure sentiment, clear like the air and simple as the pastures. Occasionally it goes beyond this, as at Vigo, where the Dolomite road swings down from the Rosengarten into the Fassa valley. Here a tall spire soars up, based on its tower with the look of a rustic, modest Salisbury. The spire is pared to such an absolute thinness that to call it a needle hardly seems a metaphor. It ought, no doubt, to look all wrong; but—helped

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probably by the surroundings—it manages to look expressive and even rather piquantly beautiful.

Below the towers are shingled wooden roofs, and on the older roofs the little tile-shaped pieces are bleached to greyness. Then come the white walls, which may be a blank under the windows or, if the church is old, may be embellished with a fresco. These frescoes, where they survive, are a characteristic of the Dolomite churches. Just as the houses were painted on the outside, so and even more were the churches, with a bold defiance of time and weather that interposes at most only a slip of eave above the painting. It seems astonishing confidence, to fresco an outside wall like that in places which are snow-bound for half the year and can have a scorching sun in summer. But enough remains—with re-touches here and there—to justify it. One case will show how inveterate the impulse was. At Milland, one of the village churches near Brixen where the school painters were busy, three frescoes have been painted over each other on the outside wall. The surviving one is an Agony in the Garden, in pale reds and yellows; at the bottom, where it is broken away, you can see another with architectural decorations; and under that again is a more primitive work in red outlines. Probably there is painting of three centuries here, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth.

A giant St. Christopher was a favourite subject: he is conspicuous at a distance, like a large picture on the white wall. He stems the water, at times with a forcible vigour in his stride and features and fluttering red smock. There are the traditional accessories: fish and strange beasts and mermaids in the water, an undulating pattern of green waves, the hermit on the bank and a view of hills and towns behind. As St. Christopher was eminently 'popular', these are usually the roughest of the frescoes and also, by means of re-touchings, the best preserved.

As a rule the frescoes do not try to be a continuous decoration—that is why, although painted in true fresco colours, they suggest pictures—but the colours always harmonize and sometimes the wall is fairly covered. At Campitello in the Fassa valley, for instance, as you look up at the church over the stream and the village, there is the impression of a whole gallery of pictures, and a varied one. The most enticing is a knight in red and green, riding a white horse and transfixing a dragon; no doubt a sixteenth-century St. George. The legend of St. Christopher is next on



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one side; and on the other a partly ruined painting in which people are busy at everyday labours and diversions. This is probably the remnant of a 'Schmerzensmann' from which the main figure has vanished. The 'Schmerzensmann' or Man of Sorrows—a Christ in large, suffering on the cross, while all around are numerous little figures pursuing the ordinary life of the world—is always clear as to its main idea. Devils are visibly active in this pictured world. But everything is not lost there; the blood of Christ flows out to all who need it. At Tesero, however, where a big painting of this kind has a loggia to itself, there is a change of emphasis and a much more limited moral. Here it is the neglect of Sunday which an Italian inscription denounces with tremendous seriousness. In the picture you see the backsliding; ploughmen and smiths are busy, idlers are sauntering and ladies contemplating themselves in the glass—and little black devils perch on the shoulders of them all.

It is tantalizing that some of the best frescoes have become mere fragments. But there is still, in fair completeness, a good deal that is interesting and sometimes of real beauty. Such are the frescoes at St. Valentin's near Seis, the bulb-steeped church under the Schlern, which is one of a whole set of attractive little churches that nest in those shelving meadows. In the pillared porch there is nothing left except some delicately painted heads, but along the south wall, protected by a broader eave than usual, there is a row of frescoes with a decided early Italian character. A hint of Giotto certainly comes with the enthroned Madonna and Child; and though it may sound absurd, I may as well be candid and say that we preferred some of the figures on the wall to those of the renowned Italian. This Madonna, at any rate, has a beautiful solemnity; and there are persuasive 'tactile values' in her pose and dress and the recession of the stately throne, which looks as Italian as the handsome border round the fresco. It is an earlyfifteenth-centurywork, according to Dr. Weingartner.

Farther north, in this meeting-ground of north and south, the other side of the Alps counts most and there is work of the same date with a visibly German suggestion. If you turn out of the Val Badia up the little side-valley of Wengen, you will come (above Wengen) to the church of St. Barbara which there is no missing in spite of its diminutiveness. For though St. Barbara's is one of the tiniest of these cat-like churches, it is perched on what my Austrian describes as a 'free hillock' and sits white

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and conspicuous at that hill-side angle. On the north side, sheltered against the bank, is a fresco of the Crucifixion. The three figures in it are hardly Italian, but if there is a touch of German emphasis in the sharp folds of the dresses there is also a wistful, still solemnity of feeling. Much of it comes from the choice of colour: the blue and white of the dappled sky, and some dark blue-purple in the Virgin's dress which tell against the Indian reds in an uncommon way. It is strange to find anything so calm and contemplative where difficulties hemmed in the artist. To paint it he must have huddled on a steep pitch of bank in a corner; he looked down on the hill-side dropping away below, and up at the precipices walling in the valley.

St. Barbara's gets a mention in the new Baedeker, but with no word of the fresco. The books seldom, if ever, notice these things, so this chapter may be excused if it becomes a catalogue of descriptions, however tiresome for those who have not seen the places. Some one, I hope, will find them out, or others like them. Meanwhile I enjoy them again as I describe them. In any case I could never leave out Taisten, for after so many anonymous things it provided a true and recognizable individual.

It is always exciting to discover an old master, even if he is only quite a little one. Simon of Taisten was serenely local. No doubt the Pustertal or Val Pusteria is an important artery, and he sprinkled it pretty thickly with his frescoes, but I imagine he never painted east of Innichen or west of Brunico. Taisten is still a pleasant village, and that in the fifteenth century a really good painter should have worked in this secluded place makes you feel how ubiquitous this kind of art was. Half an hour's walk from Monguelfo (Welsberg) in the main Pustertal takes you up to the village, concealed at first and then circling round its slopes and hollows. The first sign of antiquity is a 'Bildstock', one of those dovecote-like medieval shrines, in the form of a painted stone stump or pillar, which get as far south as the Dolomites and no farther. The old chapel of St. George, not large but lofty, stands up on a knoll behind, with a big vivacious St. Christopher limned on the wall like an immense postage-stamp. It is a sixteenth-century work which has been not badly repainted. Round the walls are the smaller, older, and distinctly various frescoes by Simon. One is a complete picture of the Virgin and Child enthroned, with angels and two attendant saints, a fresco of prevailing and captivating

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reds, rather pale but fresh and vivid. There is a Crucifixion also visibly his, but with the starker touch he used for that scene; the timber of the cross emerging in a simple realism and left, with the kneeling figure in front, in a lonely isolation on the wall without frame or border. That seems to have been Simon's way. Outside another church in the Pustertal he has painted a similar outline of the Cross and its two watchers; only there—at St. Magdalena in Moos—instead of realism there is a more primitive and passionate elongation of the forms. It is that abstract world of faith which is not the world of substance. The last of the outside paintings at Taisten is a head of Christ, also probably by him, sole vestige of a perished fresco: an interesting and unconventional piece with an expression that seems to commune with the onlooker.

The inside of the chapel is peculiar and charming. The old Romanesque building, which was vaulted in the fifteenth century, has a double apse of two storeys. The lower of them, recessed like a shell under the higher gallery, is frescoed all round its concave, first with an Annunciation and then with a remarkable Trinity, in which God the Father (a mysteriously tall thin figure with a very small head) holds the crucified Christ in his arms while a Holy Dove flies down and the sun and moon float above with human faces. It is an archaic piece with a complex but powerful design, and a cool simple colour that is decidedly appealing. Underneath is a decorative row of mitred saints—considerably 'restored'—which belong to the same school as the paintings at Brixen and are perhaps from the hand of its chief painter, Jakob Sunter. All the brilliance of the church is condensed into this frescoed apse, though the old painted statuettes of saints in front and on the gallery above save it from being otherwise empty. Its height and the uncrowded floor make the small interior look spacious. It has the air of a place which is solitary and yet still venerated. The official parish church on the hill opposite is a much larger, later and more ornate affair; the chapel is left to itself at most times, but not forgotten.

The villager who kept the key, for instance, knew all about Simon, though he assigned him a larger share in the apse than the expert would vouch for. So this minor master is still honoured in his own country. Outside it he was probably never heard of, enjoying a mere local fame beside that of the two Pacher brothers, Michael and Friedrich, who were born at Brunico in the entrance of the same valley and are—unless we

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include Titian, born at Cadore on the southern verge—the most famous artists native to the Dolomites. You will find the name of Michael Pacher in any book of the old German masters. The Pachers may have studied in the Brixen school, but they evidently learned a good deal from Italian painters like Mantegna; and their own work, fusing influences of the north and south, dominated Tyrolese painting for the best part of the fifteenth century. They were a versatile pair who carved as well as painted, and besides painting frescoes brought the art of painting on wood, in panel pictures, to its first real mastery of technique in the Tyrol. The Pachers have a competent and harmonious art; one might be sure that whatever they were commissioned to do, whether it was to paint an altar-piece or carve a crucifix, would be done with intelligence and something dignified and noble. They have an assurance of touch which makes Simon of Taisten look rather provincial and medieval. Yet somehow (and I do not think entirely because he was an unexpected find) the ‘rough Pustertaler’ seemed more interesting. It is a pity that Michael Pacher—like Titian, who left nothing in the Dolomites and only reminiscences of its peaks, here and there, in his backgrounds—should have painted by far his greatest work in another region. His really superb altar-piece at St. Wolfgang, with its endlessly unfolding wings, is away across the Alps in the neighbourhood of Salzburg. And his other altar-piece of the Fathers of the Church, so vivid in its plastic reality and its rich decoration, is one of the first things that arrests the eye in the great gallery at Munich. Undoubtedly he had grandeur as a painter. But simply on a comparison of what one sees in the Dolomites it is the obscure Simon who reveals more personality and feeling. This, as you look at some of the remains of his frescoes, you might pronounce a mere crude sincerity; but track him down again in the church at Dietenheim, near Brunico, and you will find a work carried through with subtlety and finish. It is an altar-piece painted to fill an unusually shaped space; and the difficult shape, the highly various themes and groups of people, are handled with a real sense of design and colour.

I owe Simon, like many other things, to Dr. Weingartner's book; but the happier principle is to discover for oneself and verify afterwards, and never take it for granted that a humble featureless exterior will not conceal something pleasant inside. It so often does. We did not expect anything particular from the little church of St. Nicholas in Prösels. But



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there it was, promising a moment of coolness in a torrid walk. We had failed to get into the really imposing castle after a heated climb, and that was another motive for seeing, at any rate, the church. If we had not we should have missed a fascinating interior. The church ended in a Romanesque apse, and an old, peculiarly decorative fresco filled the round of it behind the altar. This was a Coronation of the Virgin, who sat on the handsomest of thrones; the Evangelists and Fathers were in canopied stalls, hardly inferior, at the side. Precariously and yet rhythmically those white canopies—fantastic little temples in themselves—leaned round the curve of the apse; green and Indian red were the prevailing colours after the white stalls and scrolls. The figures were delicately done and a deep medallioned border framed it all. On the plastered vault of the nave the ribs were crossed and bent a little in a simple but harmonious way. There was a charming little pulpit, brightly painted all over. The church certainly had plenty of colour, condensed here and there; but as a whole it was simple and quiet. We sat there for some time; of all these country churches perhaps none had a more tranquil, detached interior than this one.

St. Nicholas is one of many cases where a small Romanesque building has been turned into Gothic as the Middle Ages went on. The sign of that is the vaulting, a century or a century and a half later than the apse. The elaboration of the vaulted ceiling came in with the later Gothic builders. It does not shape into a fan-tracery like ours, but forms all kinds of netted patterns, the ribs being flexed or broken, as it were, to make them. The simpler forms of this, as at Prösels, are really pleasing and distinguished. In the much larger church at Taufers there is a more elaborate example. It has a certain impressiveness in the high building, but its suggestion of cubical boxes is more ingenious than beautiful.

Very unlike this was the massive dignity of the Romanesque, and the best example of it in the Dolomites is the old Stiftskirche at Innichen. In renaming the town St. Candido the Italians have really paid the church a compliment, for it is dedicated to Candidus and the obscure-sounding Corbinian. It promises well from the outside, with a curious, round, tall tower and frescoes on the chapter-house; and a good deal of varied art has been put into the south doorway. Here is a fine Romanesque porch with a rare piece of thirteenth-century sculpture: an archaic Christ seated between the emblems of the Evangelists, whose symbolic beasts are carved

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with a stark massiveness that recalls the legendary creatures on the still older doorway of Schloss Tirol. Above this is one of the best preserved frescoes of Michael Pacher, a figure of St. Candidus in bishop's robes, effective in its colour and dignified sweep of rhythm. Farther along, one of Simon of Taisten's Crucifixions offers something quite unlike but significant.

Inside, the old Romanesque church is an impressive one, with the stately order of its kind enhanced by an effect of colour. It is a colour of contrasting greys, in the great square blocks of the walls and pillars, and reminds one a little of a more delicately toned interior like this at home—the cathedral at St. David's. The chief treasure of the place, and the greatest work of its kind in the Dolomites, rises behind the high altar. This is a large wooden crucifix, carved about 1200, with figures of the Virgin and St. John below on either side. These two are the rougher part, and there is something primitive in the massive cross itself and the thin arms extended on it. But the figure of the Crucified, though planned with a conception that went out of date long ago, is of all time in its mastery. The crowned head leans slightly forward, but shows no other yielding. This is no naturalistic Christ, faint with agony or half-anaesthetized in resignation. A severely handsome face looks straight over the church with a complete confidence of victory. And as the other two figures also look forwards, instead of at the cross, you have the mind of the whole group focussed, as it were, on this assurance of the issue. 'I, if I be lifted up'—it speaks past challenge in this old carving. If only it were left alone! But though the crucifix is in its right place and dominates the church, it was partly masked by the adornments of the altar when I saw it. The lower part of the cross was hidden by an embankment of flowers in pots and tins, and a simpering medallion of the Saviour. That was almost more than one could bear of the modern-Catholic decadence. Why smother this austere noble thing with such frivolities?

There is no standing still, however. After some hundreds of years Romanesque was a ghost and churches luxuriated in baroque and then rococo, which to well-regulated eyes may appear the final frivolity. It certainly is a glaring contrast to that old starkness. Yet as I remarked when speaking disrespectfully of one of these buildings, even ecclesiastical rococo is a style, however gaudy. It is a different thing from the modern plaster

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images and draperies which look like upholstered sentiment. The churches in the Dolomites are seldom cluttered with this sentimental furniture; that is one of their refreshing features. On the other hand they by no means shrink from baroque and rococo. Not always will you find a rural modesty; instead of that, as if it meant to surprise, there shoots up a florid building. Florid, at least, by contrast with its surroundings, though the native discretion keeps it simple of its kind. So, as you reach the last and highest village in the Val Badia, you come on one of these ingenious façades. Its gable, shaped into an ample, rather Jacobean curve, with curling volutes at each end, is tinted a creamy buff. Four tall yellow pilasters divide the white wall underneath, and in the midst a niche, pale red like the steeple, holds a statuette of St. Cassian. It is all very lightly and agreeably done, though with a touch of the rococo that looks grandiose among those simplicities of the mountain. Farther down the valley, at San Leonardo, there is a more assertive example of the fashion.

One might fancy it is the contrast with the mountain world that makes the people like a touch of human grandeur. Or do those fantastic rock-forms inspire a taste for lively embellishments? In any case the peasants like the rococo when they get it, and probably for a simpler reason. Its ornaments and hints of liberal riches satisfy their naïve idea of magnificence. It is quite right that the house of God and the saints should be as superb as possible, a more superb version of what they imagine the houses of the great to be. It is not exactly what they would make themselves, still less inhabit, but it has its fitness. Also—and this is a real point in common with their taste—it has its gaiety. A lively outburst of colour and form is something that appeals to them. For the cheerfulness of the peasants, their decided liking for colour and ingenious forms, are as deep-rooted as their faiths and superstitions. Ruskin's remarks about the 'mountain gloom' may be safely banished from one's mind in the Dolomites, as I said in a previous chapter; and all that needs saying here is that the churches are an illustration of the matter.

It comes out in the vivacious little pulpits, swelling balcony-fashion from the wall with bright decoration. The Evangelists and their emblems provide four panels or medallions; the rest is in cool colours edged with gold, or is marbled according to the maker's fancy. These church artists had a taste for marbling, and their reds and greens and yellows on the

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wooden columns or pedestals of altars might intrigue a London virtuoso. The pews by contrast give an air of strong simplicity. Their seats are plain and generally unvarnished, but the bench-ends are always carved in variants of one pattern, a rising upright curve which in some moods may suggest a sea-horse and in others—the base flowing like a skirt—a kneeling woman. The people are workers in wood by instinct and by their ways of life, and they like shaping and playing with it. I remember a confessional box where the top had been carved into curtain-folds, with rows of hanging wooden tassels. And in a more serious vein the statuettes, especially the older ones, are often of good quality.

Yet these are not churches where one goes to look for museum pieces. What one feels rather is the life in them, an unpretentious, genuine life like that of the houses. And the way in which new and old objects meet and marry there proves how long it has lasted. An instance from the church at Arabba, which escaped by rare luck in the war, will show what I mean. All travellers from Cortina to Bolzano have stopped for a few minutes in the village, which lies pleasantly at the foot of the Pordoi Pass and below the Marmolata. In the war this happened to be the contested line, and Arabba was a shattered tangle of ruins when I first saw it. Only the church survived by something like a miracle. It was built in the seventeenth century, and has a particularly attractive little pulpit; and under the gallery a fine old bench in red and green with three big stars—the favourite device—in white on the back of it. Just before the war the church was done up and two new frescoes were added. In the chief one St. Peter is receiving the keys, while the sheep whom he is to feed stray around; and the scene where this is going on is the landscape of Arabba itself, the church and the Marmolata unmistakable behind, with its snowfield and splintered lower ridges. The conversion of St. Paul in the other fresco is surveyed likewise by peaks of the Dolomites. No one, certainly, would call these frescoes great art. They do not pretend to be. For all that, there is something right about them: a sense of the lines and pure colours that fresco demands, and a much fresher touch and more idea of decoration than one generally finds in the modern, lifeless attempts of this kind in English churches. When we asked who had done them, the answer was 'Only a local man—of course, he wasn't an *artist*'. And we were glad that he wasn't. The 'artist' would have tried something much more sophisti-

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cated and probably much less satisfying. As it was, here was a craftsman fourteen years ago who could produce work that had a stamp of its own, that was new and yet in harmony with the old tradition.

But the church I should like to end with—even a catalogue has an end—is not conspicuously old or new. It is nothing except itself, and seems to me more a magical little apparition than a building. It stands alone at the end of its world, the last pleasure of a pleasant valley. For there are many things to please the eye as one goes up the Vlnöstal: the valley itself, which seems shut off from everything else but has its cheerful, open fields; the houses and hamlets with engaging shrines and bits of painting. And always, in a cluster of wild peaks behind, the Gaislerspitzen. Where the forest begins and the mountain paths go up, is the last habitation; a fine old farm-house, once a noble's hunting-box, which has stood there for centuries. By the side of it a broad meadow ripples from the trees, and in the middle of the meadow stands a tiny church, alone. There is nothing one would less expect to find. It seems to have sprung, on its low platform of grass and stone, like a flower which the mowers left standing because there was rock under it.

For the church is really like a flower. Small as it is, a mere chapel, it is tall and slender for its size, as if the white tower with a bulb at the top had drawn the walls up higher. And it was patterned with flower-like colours, the tower edged and banded with rose-red, while on the slim façade were vases and two wreathed and twisted pilasters—all merely painted things, in delicate pinks and blues and yellows. Under the red-bordered windows each side of the door a last naïve touch had added two small landscapes.

It is hard to describe the effect without making it sound garish. I am not even sure how many will like it in the illustration, but to us it had the simplicity of a natural thing in its gay and tender colour. One felt a little wistfulness too, because it stood there so solitary. But the church was perfectly serene in the midst of its big meadow. It is the only pretty church in the Dolomites that I have never got into, but now I no longer want to go inside. It is better to lie among the gentians in the meadow. The outside is so complete that I prefer to keep it as the little vision which it is, and the whole place returns to memory like a bit of Paradise miraculously deposited. Yet it was the Dolomites, after all, and I ask myself

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where else could just such a church be found in such surroundings? It was typical that it should be there, and that it should be the last thing on the road into the mountains.



VI

SAINTS AND SHRINES

THERE IS a figure that occurs so often in the wayside shrines and frescoes of the Dolomites that at last in desperation you have to find out who he is. It is the figure of a priest, with a biretta on his head and a fur tippet on his shoulders—which fur, in all the realistic examples, appears to be rich ermine. He wears a gold chain round his neck and his surplice is of the best. Evidently he is a priest of quality, and in the fashion of the past he looks it; being (as a rule) a handsome and rather languishing person with a curly beard. But he is also a martyr or confessor, with a cross and a palm in his hands, which he regards with a half-wilting, half-aspiring attitude. Usually he is nameless; it is taken for granted that every one knows who he is. So they certainly do in the Dolomites, for he can charm one of the most unruly of physical forces. But the first time I found an effigy of him with a name to it—it was complete with gold chain and ermine tippet—my ignorance was only the more perplexed. The legend underneath was simply 'S. Giovanni'. This was a bewildering shock. What in heaven's name could St. John be doing in these habiliments of a courtly confessor? The puzzle was presently cleared up. It was St. John indeed, but St. John Nepomuk.

Nepomuk, it must be admitted, is an improbable name for a saint. It would do very well for the prankish tricks of a forest sprite. Actually it is the name of a town in western Czecho-Slovakia. There John Nepomuk, patron saint of Bohemia, was born about 1330; and as most readers probably know as little about him as I did, his picturesque story shall be told.

He passed a virtuous boyhood. He went to the university of Prague and became a doctor of it, and then fulfilled a desire which had been his since childhood and became a priest. It was while preaching a 'Lent' at the court of Wenceslaus, the King-Emperor, that he was recognized as a person of very exceptional gifts. He refused a bishopric, we are told, but became Court Almoner, and made himself a refuge for all the afflicted

and the poor of Prague; and then, by a further step which decided his destiny, he was appointed director to the wife of Wenceslaus, the Empress Jane. This involved him in the troubles of an unhappy pair. Wenceslaus was a violent being and especially frantic in jealousy. His wife, under Nepomuk's influence, absorbed herself more and more in prayer and works of charity—a life which to Wenceslaus made it only more likely that things could not be what they appeared. He made a first attempt to get Nepomuk to betray what the empress had disclosed in confession and it failed, of course. Happening, however, to be dissatisfied one day with the roasting of a fowl, he ordered the cook to be roasted alive at the same fire; and when Nepomuk ran to intervene, Wenceslaus consigned him to a dungeon. Thence he was released and invited to a court dinner in his honour, but it was followed by a private conversation in which Wenceslaus pressed him again for the secrets of confession, offering rewards or, alternatively, torture and death. Nepomuk stood firm, and he was imprisoned, racked, burnt at a slow fire, and left half-dead.

But the empress extricated him and he reappeared at court, rejoicing in his sufferings and preaching more fervently than ever. This saintly halo was particularly odious to Wenceslaus. He looked out of the window one evening, and seeing Nepomuk passing alone in the street ordered him to be brought in, and threatened him with death if he did not disclose the secrets of confession. Nepomuk was silent; and at nightfall he was thrown off the bridge into the Moldau and drowned. A heavenly light appeared above his body and drew the people to the banks. Next day the executioners told the story, and he was buried magnificently in the cathedral. From that time, in fact, Nepomuk was exalted and the royal fortunes declined. The empress languished and died in a few years. Wenceslaus was deposed from the imperial throne and warred on and twice held under restraint by the nobles of Bohemia. But Nepomuk's glory was secure, in spite of the Hussites and Calvinists who tried successively to profane his tomb. In the Thirty Years' War the great Catholic victory at Prague was ascribed to his help. When his tomb was opened early in the eighteenth century his tongue was found free from corruption; and in 1729 he was canonized a saint.

This is his legend, as told by the hagiographers. But I am grieved to say the historians tell an entirely different tale. It is ruthlessly prosaic by



9 ST. JOHN NEPOMUK

contrast and cuts out all the best parts. According to history it seems that Nepomuk perished in a struggle between Wenceslaus and the Church party. The Archbishop of Prague was the king's chief political enemy; Nepomuk was the archbishop's chief official. The king was defied when he tried to suppress a monastery, and while the archbishop escaped Nepomuk was seized. As he refused to give evidence against his superior or desert him, he was tortured and then thrown into the river. Thus Nepomuk is left with his staunchness but shorn of a good deal of his halo. It appears that at the time he was canonized Bohemian history was only known from an entirely unreliable chronicle. However, an expert authority in these subjects, Father Delehaye, who although a Roman Catholic is an unsparing analyst of the legends of the saints, observes that legends are meant for the people, and largely created by them. It was certainly the people who made Nepomuk a defender of the poor, just as it was the Church that made him a martyr for the secrecy of confession. He had a niche marked out for him in the Counter-Reformation, when the statues of Huss were often turned into statues of Nepomuk. The last touch which made this clerical saint a popular one was the manner of his dying.

For Nepomuk, having perished by water, is by heavenly logic the saint who protects you from the same. That is why he has managed to cross the Alps and become a refuge and strength in the Dolomites. Any one who watches the behaviour of a mountain stream knows that it can be as dangerous as the bad King Wenceslaus. (It is with the kings as with the two St. Johns; 'good King Wenceslaus' must clearly have been another person of the same name.) So St. John Nepomuk is constantly found near water—and yet, being so popular, also away from it; on hill-side slopes and village houses, as in the fresco of the illustration, an uncommon piece which eschews realism and has an almost Chinese simplicity of outline. But he is chiefly near water, in a painting or a toy statuette on mills and by bridges, in fact wherever the element may get out of control. He has travelled with this charm beyond the Dolomites and over the Stelvio, down to the bottom of it on the other side into the real Italy, where little Bormio, with its narrow streets and many towers, proclaims itself a true Italian town. In none of the mountain places has he struck firmer root than Bormio. It has a 'Nepomuk bridge' with a shrine of him and an elaborate picture in the church. When you see the place you

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guess the reason; the mountain river may be an awkward neighbour to have.

But enough of Nepomuk. There is only one other saint who runs him close for popularity in the Dolomites. This is St. Florian, who may be seen on many houses and in the middle of villages and especially on the village pump. The reason is that he has a virtue which is the exact complement of Nepomuk's. He protects from fire and appears usefully with a bucket when required. It seems an even more desirable virtue than the other in this land of wooden houses. Behold him, then, at the centre of operations, on the pump, a small and gaily painted wooden figure of unexpectedly military and classical appearance; a Roman soldier, in fact, with a red cloak thrown over his shoulder and breastplate and bare knees and buskins complete. In one hand he probably grasps a standard, with the other he unceasingly pours water from his pail or pitcher over a diminutive house or church, himself usually looking into the distance with an air which varies between a dashing truculence and a total unconcern. He is most dashing, not to say flamboyant, on the houses, where he stands as a kind of insurance against a possible fire or commemorates a past one. These frescoes, however, are generally some of the crudest.

St. Florian is an Austrian tutelar saint and came here, like Nepomuk, from the old Empire. There is no such contradiction between legend and history in his case as there was in the other; there is simply a fact, which the legend embroiders with miracle. The fact is that he was a Roman soldier, born at what is now Enns, in Lower Austria, who professed Christianity and was martyred in the persecution of Galerius. The miracle, which has given him an immense popularity in the old Austrian dominions and carried him over the Alps, is that he once put out a conflagration by throwing a pitcherful of water on the flames. The peasants in the Dolomites could hardly do without St. Florian, and in those engaging little figures of him a belief of centuries somehow pierces through the toy.

There is one more saint whose story ought to be told. It is not because she recurs often—being in fact rather sparse in her appearances—but because when you do find her you may be puzzled who she is. To the eye she is simply a nice, innocent-looking young peasant girl in a straw bonnet and blue dress, holding a sickle in one hand and a rake or a corn-sheaf in the other. She might be just a maiden of the Dolomites, except

that there seems no reason why one of them should have a shrine in a meadow or figure on an altar as a saint. And she is one of their kind, being a neighbour of theirs from north Tyrol. As a saint, however, she is recent and local, and for a score of visitors who may have heard of St. John Nepomuk I doubt if there is one who knows St. Notburga.

It is a story of how the humblest peasant maiden may live like a saint.

Notburga did nothing remarkable in the world like Joan of Arc; her legend is complete just because it is simple and small. She lived in the Unterinntal at the end of the thirteenth century. In her village she was so regarded for her piety and wisdom that the lord of a neighbouring castle desired to have her in his household. There she was promoted to the highest position of trust and became his almoner. But his son Henry returned with a bride, Ottilia, who was jealous of the girl. When the old knight and his wife died Notburga was deprived of her almonership and set to feed the pigs with the portion of the poor. She managed to go on feeding the poor by existing herself on bread and water. Presently Ottilia shut her out of the castle. Then she took service with a peasant as a field labourer, and refusing on one occasion to work over a holy eve for her employer, showed him her sickle suspended miraculously in the air. A year later Ottilia became dangerously ill and sent for Notburga in remorse. Ottilia had a vision of pigs in her delirium and died penitent—a sinister version has it that she rushed out to wallow in the pigsty and the pigs ate her alive. Notburga was invited by Henry to return to the castle, but she insisted on finishing her three years' contract with the peasant and came back so worn by privations that she died soon after. Her body was laid on a bier and two young oxen were yoked to it and left to find their own way; they brought her to the foot of an altar in a field-chapel, where a century later the emperor and the Bishop of Brixen raised a church.

She was not canonized until 1862, and her small legend must have been rooted in the heart of the people to last so long. For it is a legend of the people if ever there was one, in its simple lines. The peasant heroine who rises to the highest 'place' in the castle but is so conscientious that she works out her time in the fields, the wicked lady of high degree, and all the details of the story are a naïvely touching dramatization of the peasants' mind.

The invocation of the saints appears to me an entirely natural and

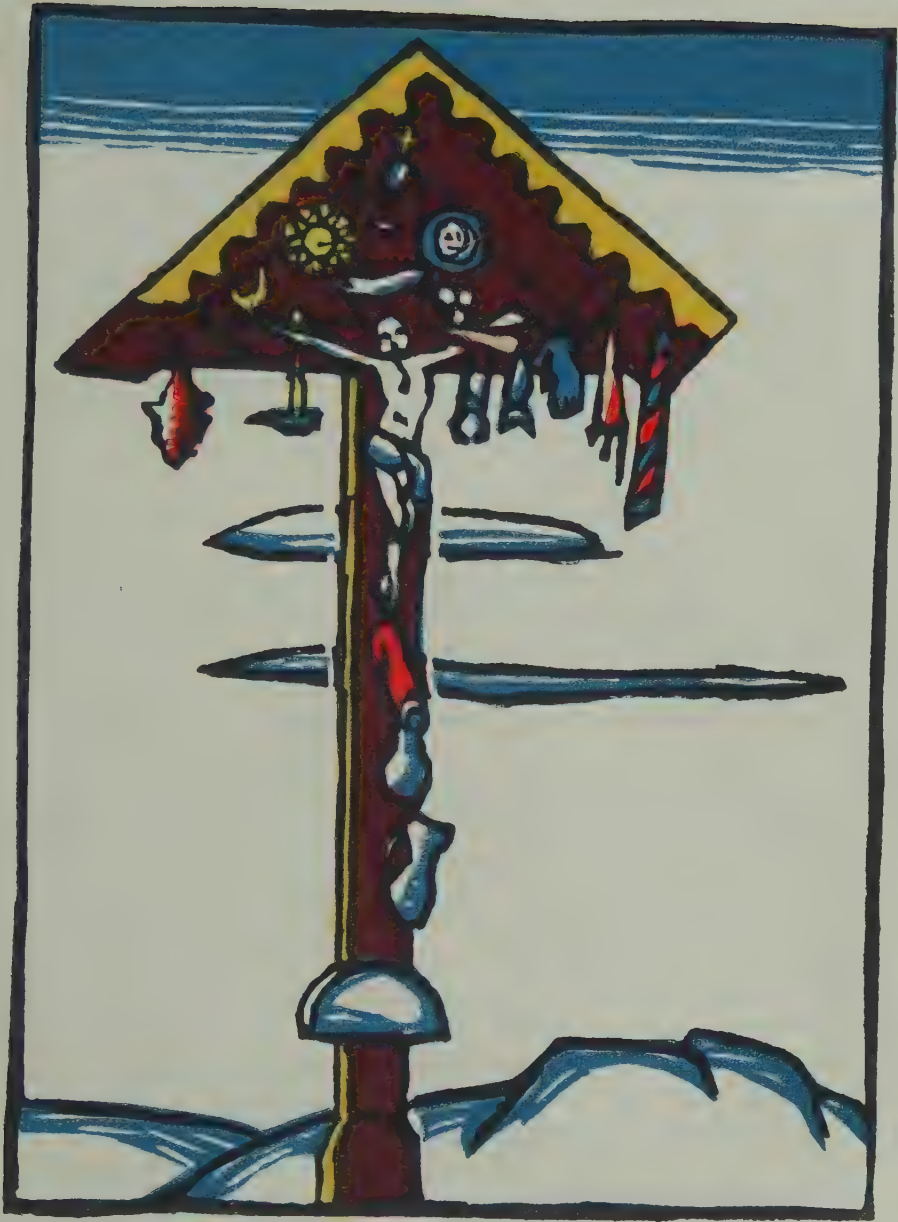
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reasonable thing in this mountain country. I hardly see how in the past it could have been avoided. Not always did communications, as now, provide change of places and faces; the people were secluded and as much at the mercy of their lords as mountain-folk will let themselves be. What wonder if they looked for friends and patrons and found them in the company of the saints? In the wild, precarious mountain life this help was always worth invoking. And of all the dangers, not merely of the mountains, but of existence itself as a former time envisaged it, there is an epitome in the words on a sixteenth-century shrine in the Val di Fassa: 'St. Giuliana ci guarda dalla peste, fame, e guerra, e dalle tentazioni del demonio.' Inside the low-vaulted shrine were arabesques and a pleasing fresco of St. Lawrence, with water and towns and Dolomite peaks behind. Over which was written: 'Dies gemal hat gemacht David Solbach Maler zu Brixen 1573.' The meeting of the two languages in one place was characteristic.

These figures and shrines of saints are on the whole more gay than solemn. They have been fashioned debonairly, as if the makers delighted in the contact of the saints with the earth, and they bring a colour into it.

This colour and contrast are sometimes very piquant. There is a particularly engaging little shrine which meets you suddenly among the rocks, on the way down from the plateau of Ciampatsch in the Gardennazza. Unless it be the exotic name of Ciampatsch—which is as variable to spell as Russia's 'Chehov'—nothing in those stony wastes can have prepared you for what you see there. Four small figures are in attendance on a Madonna. Saints they must be, or they would not be there, but—saints and mitred bishops all—what they are evidently thinking of is something different. By their garb and their beards, their air of poising for a dance, they are just going to break into a Russian ballet.

But there is, I admit, another kind of contrast. In the crucifixes which appear so constantly by the roads, on the paths, and in solitary places, you come on the whole pain of the world, condensed into one suffering figure. There is no escaping it. Suffering, they seem to say, is at the root of life; the Cross goes through to the centre. And their re-enacting of the physical anguish, the torment and death of the body, is another pain. For in these, unlike the mighty crucifix at Innichen, there is no assurance of the issue; only the fact of its being undergone. But for the people it is enough that Christ has suffered and embraced their sufferings. They know pain and



10 A WAYSIDE CRUCIFIX

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privation in their own lives. At first you may be troubled by this emphasis on the hour of suffering; and then it expresses a simple, mysterious reality, without which the other light-hearted shrines would be less sincere.

Even here there are various moods. Very intense and yet reserved in spirit are the little old crucifixes of rough bleached wood which stand far up on the highest pastures. They have been carved with a spare and rather beautiful austerity; and it is not merely this which makes them moving, for only the most genuine impulse would have placed them where they are. The more elaborate painted crucifixes in the valleys are a contrast to these. Wherever and of whatever kind it is, the cross is always hooded with a sort of pent-house gable. Sometimes this shelters a group, —a figure carved on each side of the cross—painted in reds and blues which time has made paler. In another vein and of a child-like naiveness are the crosses on which all the instruments of the Passion hang or have been carved—the scourge, hammer, nails, pincers, spear, Judas's money-bag, the divided garment, and the soldiers' dice. If it were only these gruesome symbols that dangled in the wind the effect might be ghoulish, but they are relieved by others of an amusing innocence. Above the cross a little 'God the Father' (head and shoulders only) emerges from a cloud; a Holy Dove completes the Trinity; and there are the sun and moon with uncouth faces. There is something toy-like in the whole effect; it almost looks as if it were meant to be played with.

On the whole there are extremely few horrors among the crucifixes of the Dolomites. They have not got the southern taste for lurid sensation. None of them are frankly repellent except certain strange ones in which, by carving-tool or paint, the white body of Christ is spotted all over with gashes like the semblance of a leopard skin. These grim images are few and pretty well localized. But the crucifixes by no means exclude a dramatic effect, and constantly get one from their mere situation in out-of-door nature. Such is the one at the shrine of Heiligkreuz above the Val Badia. This is a much-visited place of pilgrimage, though extremely easy to miss if you once stray from any of the paths that lead to it. The little white church is elusive; sometimes extraordinarily distinct on its knoll above the woods, at the foot of the cliffs of Kreuzkofel, but more often concealed and altogether lost to view as you slant across the seamed and wooded base of the mountain. When you get there it is a delicious place,

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with an 'alp' of its own and a great view from the stretch of grassy knolls. There stands the church, which has some attractive things inside and a good sixteenth-century picture; and a small guest-house where you may eat and sleep.

And then there is the crucifix. Turning the corner of the church, you see a straining, grimacing figure on a cross in front of the ochre-coloured rocks of the Kreuzkofel. It is the impenitent thief, and until the rest of the Calvary comes into view he is really disconcerting. All the figures are dramatic and the vision of them is abruptly strange. Seen against that mountain-block, however, which rises with equal suddenness but a few yards behind them the shock of the Calvary becomes part of a general extraordinariness. There is a wild, half-barbaric vitality. Here for the first time I learned that the names of the two thieves are Gismas and Dismas. Their names were on the crosses. But to remember which is which was difficult. I never found the means of doing it till I unexpectedly met one of them again in a little book on Northumbrian history.¹ It occurs in the March Laws of the northern Border. The reiver or other miscreant who was unlucky enough to be found guilty of 'march treason' was admonished by the sheriff, as he was led out for execution, to be-think himself 'of *Dismas*, who hung on the right hand and repented'.

There is a dramatic effect of a less startling kind, in a different setting, at the village or little town of Kastelruth. The leafy green hill behind, where we went to look for the ruins of the Burg, seemed—as the seats showed that it was—a place excellently devised for idling in coolness. It has a view, over pleasant foregrounds, of the rocky mass of Schlern. Then a chapel gleamed white along the path, and a glance inside showed a group of painted figures that were certainly arresting, as the phrase goes. It was Christ carrying the cross, among two or three soldiers and executioners. Presently we came on other scenes—the crowning with thorns, the scourging. The once castellated hill had been turned at the end of the seventeenth century into a regular Kalvarienberg or Sacro Monte. The carved and painted figures are rough work, but there is a highly dramatic vigour in some of the scenes, nor have any of them a sanguinary ghastliness. The soldiers and their like wear costumes of the period when the shrines were made, and the colours are vivid. On the top of the hill is a

¹ The late Mr. Howard Pease's *Northumbria's Decameron*.

grassy space between the trees, and an old tower on one side with the scene of Christ before Pilate in an open window. As we came down we found a chapel we had missed, the Agony in the Garden, which was more impressive than the others because the carver had a subtler hand and had used the ground to make a landscape. The figures were grouped under a crag of the hill; the disciples slumbered among the rocks; and in front of them some one's pious care had planted a charming plot of flowers. So here, for once in the scene, was the peace and fairness of an actual garden, and those pinks and lilies and the rest gave a singular freshness to the well-cut figures.

I have left to the end what is in some ways the most peculiar and pleasing type of shrine in the Dolomites. These are the 'Bildstocks', which are fairly common in the old German-speaking districts. They are, in fact, South German. I am entirely hopeless of translating the word Bildstock, the more so because most English people seem never to have heard of the object named. To call it a picture-stump or a pillar-picture scarcely conveys the meaning. Imagine, however, a stone dovecote, short and rather stumpy, by the way-side. Or, again, a grey stone pillar-box cut square. At the top each face of this is hollowed into a recess, deep or shallow; each recess is adorned with a painting, and the whole thing is capped with an extinguisher made of stone or wooden shingle.

The result—in its unusualness, yet also its assumption that these way-side pillars are familiar things—is one of the most perfectly medieval objects that I know. It is a different-looking medievalism from that of a sleeping knight or a leering gargoyle. But it is both homely and curious in its shape and painted stone. The painted recesses are often faded and sketchy; but where they have been restored, as in the large Bildstock at Monguelfo, which has fragments of Michael Pacher's original painting, one sees how vivid they were. A Crucifixion, a Madonna and various pairs of saints usually filled the niches. The cornices or ears between them may be painted or carved. Sometimes the whole thing grows slender instead of stumpy. One uncommon-shaped Bildstock near Brunico forgoes the extinguisher and has a kind of stone clock-face at the top; it is a strangely Eastern-looking object as it stands on a fence by the road. I had an unexpectedly distant view of another in the Pustertal, which was a cherished haunt of Bildstocks. To see anything so relatively small at a distance is

rare. It struck me that if only there were a few more Bildstocks in the open the pursuit of them would be exactly like stalking giant mushrooms. This one *was* a stone mushroom—only a pyramid instead of a table—in the way it peered, half-hidden, above the surface of the fields. When tracked down it was found to be standing at the edge of a rise, where the field-road sloped to a stream. It was absolutely rural and just where one wanted to sit down. For this the Bildstock itself offered facilities, being carved into seats at the bottom; but the grass was still better. Nor was it merely the place but the look of the object, which had a singularly tall and deep extinguisher and an unusually rich variety of painted saints and scenes, that made this fifteenth-century pillar near Niederolang perhaps the most gratifying Bildstock that I know.

But one's mind has its frivolous caprices. Partly because of them, and because it is endeared by old acquaintance, I think more often of a certain little Bildstock which seems to make fun of all the rest. I ended my catalogue of churches with a tiny one in the Vilmöstal—or Val di Funès—and this other object belongs to the same valley of delights. It stands, in fact, on the road which leads to that sequestered church of Ranui. There is a grassy margin and a big boulder out of which the Bildstock seems to grow, so that it remains almost as much a boulder as a Bildstock. And in the deep hollow of its squat pillar there is, not a picture, but an image. The figure rises inside with the suddenness of a jack-in-the-box. It is God the Father in blue and gold and scarlet, emerging from a curly stone cloud. One outflung hand clutches a cross, the other the blue orb of the world. The idea is usual but the manner was not, and this sudden apparition had a vivacity, not to say a wild air of excitement. What with the gesture and the wavy cloud it was more suggestive of a ballet than a sermon. In the face, however, there was misgiving and perhaps despair. It was a very perplexed-looking Creator who poised the world in that left hand. What was the world, indeed? Was it really good, or could it ever be? At any rate, 'si muove'—it moves. And you cannot pass the image by. There is a life in the shrines and churches of the Dolomites, and a waft of it has certainly gone into that bright, startling little figure caged in stone.



II THE LITTLE BILDSTOCK

VII. FLOWERS

IT IS hard to write about flowers in the Dolomites without thinking of Reginald Farrer. That expert lover of the flowers of the mountains, who tracked their beauty and rarities from Europe to Tibet, rated these eastern Alps high among such treasure-places. One feels that his book on the Dolomites, vivacious as it is about mountains and localities, was most of all a joyful pretext for writing of the subject he knew best. To it, therefore, all who really want to know should go for full enlightenment. My own chapter is not written for the botanist. It pretends to nothing more than a record of the innocent enjoyment of things seen: an enjoyment, however, complete and distinct enough to take its own place among remembered pleasures.

Casual as they have mostly been, they provide one curious instance of the influence of a writer and his book. We arrived at Misurina one summer near the end of June, when the only hotel which had come to life again since the war was just open. There were five other guests there, all English; and all had been drawn there, like ourselves, by the pages in which Farrer had celebrated the Misurina heights as a region of flowers. So for flowers we all looked by day, and we talked of them at night.

I own that, as far as we two were concerned, it was a slight disappointment. Probably it was not Misurina's fault, but ours. One's 'first fine careless rapture' over the early Alpine flowers comes but with the thrill of the first impression; and we had got this impression three weeks before, on the Mont Cenis. That ragged upland, otherwise unbeautiful, spread an amazing feast of beauty for us. It began with the gentians; it went on to the armies of little violas which diapered the grass round the mountain lake in regiments marshalled by their colour—purple, yellow, and white, or the mixed coat of purple and yellow. Up the slopes above them the Alpine anemones flocked in unsurpassable strength and profusion, the pure glistening candour of their flower cups enhanced by the greenish-white transparency of the petals as one saw them from underneath, ranged

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one above the other on a steep hill-side. It was something more than we could have believed and it could not be forgotten.

But those were other Alps, and my text is of the Dolomites. The quest of flowers is like the spirit of romance; it holds out the spell of beauty and the surprise of rarity or strangeness. This time beauty had been so lavishly poured out for us in the west that nothing which the Dolomites showed could equal it. And for the sleuth-hound pursuit of rarity, of the unique specimen, we were not sufficiently ardent botanists. It must be added that on the Forcella, to which Farrer more particularly directed us, this delightful chase was not an unmixed pleasure. For those heights were haunted four years ago by particularly virulent mosquitoes, and to be harried by these pests on a barren plateau seven thousand feet above the sea was almost too ironical.

But one grey and stuffy afternoon was well retrieved by certain exhilarating finds on the way down from the Col di Varda. It would be too ambitious a word to call them discoveries; these were the sudden apparitions of flowers that were conspicuous enough to hold one's gaze and to charm it by something fragile or exotic in their quality. First there were lilies of Paradise glowing white in a lush meadow; these, as we found out presently, are common enough in the Dolomites, but nature seemed to be sheltering them here in a greenhouse of her own. The suggestion of something delicate or rare was renewed by a cluster of lady's slipper orchids in a darkling wood, a piquant and rather unholy contrast to the lilies in their characteristic brown petals and big yellow lips. And then, last and fairest of all, outside the wood came a find of the tall slim gentian—*utriculosa*—whose small blossoms are of the most exquisite blue, perhaps, among all gentians.

It was a good climax to an afternoon, a different satisfaction from that of finding a whole array of flowers, but nearly as generous in its swift individual contrasts. But at the right time and place the Dolomites can spread their rich carpet of mountain blooms. The best way of giving an impression of them may be simply to describe what one chanced upon in the course of an actual walk.

This was almost exactly the same date as at Misurina—in the third week of June—although this year summer was much later in coming. We had gone up, a party of four, from St. Cristina in the Val Gardena on to

the heights where Langkofel turns precipitously round to the more shelving slabs of Plattkofel. Before we had finished mounting through the woods there were gentians in plenty: the little *verna*, with its spring-like simplicities of blue, whether lighter or deeper, and those dark full-throated trumpets of the *acaulis*, growing as suddenly and close to the ground as certain mushrooms. On the top the trees open and grow thinner; the rocky sweep of Langkofel rears its defiance. Keeping just under it we were on the eastern verge of the Seiseralp, that billowy green plateau, about six miles by four, which flows up to the strong bases of Langkofel, the Rosengarten and the Schlern. There our real delights began, where the alp was half wood, half pasture. The pinks of the little mountain primula came into view, singly or in shy groups at first, and then with a lavish plenty. The *farinosa* is a modest little thing, but when it lets itself go it can work wonders, and whole reaches of grass here were sheeted with the spray of pink which can veer from paleness to a full depth of colour. The gentians picked out this radiance with their varying blues. Little soldanellas clustered in shady places, their frail stems and violet fringes looking as though they were modelled out of wax. Everywhere there was a shimmer of colour emerging from small and delicate things. It was a perfect garden which had elected to flourish there of its own accord.

That is what is so extraordinary about these natural gardens of the mountains: the spontaneous decision of them all. It may seem a mistake to use any word so deliberate; one should imagine them wholly unconscious, haphazard, ethereal, and so forth. All this, no doubt, they are and their enchantment is light and sudden. But there is another side to their ways which gives its tinge to our pleasure. These innocent things are so audaciously and yet quietly determined. The sense of this is borne in on us all the more when it is a case of such frail-looking little objects as the primulas and soldanellas. When I think of their array I feel that 'wild' is not at all the name for it. There are flowers in the mountains which are not only wild but look the part, having something bizarre or defiant in their lustre. Such are those brown-petalled orchids or the flaming, tawny orange of the tiger-lilies. But the smaller, shyer flowers arrange their proceedings with an extreme nicety.

In fact part of the charm in these unexpected displays is that fairy-like effect which seems almost—or more delicately—human. The touch of

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likeness to man's works is only the shade of a suggestion, but just perceptible enough to contrast with the alien starkness of the mountains. The flowers dispose their triumphant little gardens as cunningly as we make ours. One sees them in fancy willing it all. Perhaps some human will look at it, perhaps not; in any case they have fulfilled their own end and pleasure. And they refuse to be admired patronizingly. It would be absurd to compliment them for anticipating the elaborate man-made cultivations. No, these minute particulars are the divinely created originals and the purest gardens, of which we only fashion receding and ever more artificial replicas.

Dim meditations like these strayed through my mind as we lay on the sward where we had halted for lunch. It was a green dell more brilliant than the slopes, though all were now in the richness of their first summer green. Little streamlets entered it from the sides, winding round rocks and channelling the grassy level which was covered with blue and pink flowers. The gentians and primulas would not be bounded by that floor; they crept along the banks of the runlets and even paddled in the water. It was pleasant to see their confidence in quiescent, sunlit nature. But they dared too much. A week later, when we came that way again, they seemed punished for having been so adventurous. Heavy rains had fallen in the interval, and the second time we splashed our way through the dell as through a marsh. One looked now into a glassy pool and saw the primulas standing an inch or more under its surface, still erect but expiring pallidly in their strange watery element. Winter, uncommonly loth to go that year, had caught them in its last clutches.

On the first day, as we came out from the dell and ranged higher up, we were close upon the skirts of it. Long stretches of snow were all about the Palaccia, the high ridge which terminates the alp; streaking it in zebra patterns and folding into all its corrugations. But round us was a second zone of flowers. Sulphur anemones were sprinkled here in abundance, although growing low on short stems close to the ground as if they had something to encounter. Not often do they equal the tall up-springing strength of the Alpine anemone, nor does their tint show the lustre of that whiteness. But their yellow cups are full of fresh fair colour, shaded by the greyish-green on the outside of the petals. As they ranged over the slopes there soon were pasque flowers mingling with them. They, even more than the sulphur anemones, hide their white petals and yellow

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calyx in a shaded envelope. What they offer is the silky down of their purplish-white outsides, with its insinuating softness.

Yet there is no shyness in these flowers of the open. Rather, as they dot the alp, they give you that curious sense of things which are on the move, which have come out to expatiate on the hills and are only half-stationary. It comes from their look of free advance, as though you might turn your back and then find they had shifted on to try a new pasture. The coming and going of the nearer snows enhances this transitory feeling.

But the real children of the snows are the crocuses. For not only are they swift to reclaim every brown muddy patch that the melting snow leaves behind, but they will shoot up their heads—with here and there an incongruously frail soldanella by them—through a crisp snow-bed itself. As we went on among these late-lying snows the white and purple crocuses were crowding on to each recovered patch in serried little tribes. They were in such a multitude as one does not see often.

Meanwhile we were abroad on the alp, with our way to find to the Seiseralpenhaus, its hospitable and highest refuge. This was not so easy to see with those dazzling lines of white streaking the ground and confounding the landmarks, and this end of the alp folds into many corners. At length the house was in view on its bluff under the Rosengarten cliffs; invitingly near—yet not really so near, and obviously with a good deal of snow to be traversed before one got there. In half an hour we were pounding over that snow with uncertain footsteps; sometimes it was hard and we went firmly and swiftly, but as often as not we were in it up to the knees over the width of a snow-bed. Reaching the house, we dismissed most of our shoes and stockings to the stove, for we were hardly shod with a view to the adventure. Under a pale blue sky we sat bare-legged on that veranda of the superb view. A sharp little wind blew round and we edged into the scarcely warming sun, trying to pretend that it was summer. The house itself had only been open for three days; Dialer, its big, genial despot, had not yet arrived; and our tea was but an ironical skeleton of the one, rich in whipped cream and cake, which had been spread for us in a mid-July two years earlier. But tea is—in some sense—always tea. A little rest after the snow-trudge was even better, and presently we were speeding down refreshed towards the valley.

A thousand feet below, where the stream begins to hollow its *thal* out

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of the alp, the sun was blazing again with a gracious heat and we were under a bright blue of real summer. In these warmer pastures it was the turn of the globe-flowers. They mixed with the buttercups and the curled balls of concentrated yellow prevailed against them. These, certainly, were gold-sheeted meadows. But the early summer-time is always lavish, nor does it stint itself to one colour. Where the globe-flowers thinned, saxifrages clustered on little swells of the ground. One cushion of them after another showed various shades of pink, all delicate; and then, bolder and richer to the eye, there was the full red-pink of the daphne.

After the companionable saxifrages one seemed to come to the end of the flowers. The sun-warmed alp itself came to an end, and the path dropped among pine-woods, following the torrent down and down as it wound past these steep buttresses of the heights into the valley. It was a closely enveloped way and a good deal longer than we had imagined. These last descents from a day's walk have a way of stretching themselves out, and nothing great or small offered itself for the eye's diversion, until, far down and where the glen was breaking into a view of the valley, we found bushes and tree-stems here and there wreathed with atragene. That clematis-like plant loves the woody places in the Dolomites and flourishes there so much that it seems one of the most familiar natives of the region. The atragene is as dark and lissome as its name. Lavish of its soft bluish-purple flowers, it will weave them in circles near the ground and then climb high, a trailing creeper, festooning round trunks and branches its wreaths of bloom. It is in tone and yet in contrast with the dimness of the woods.

We were soon on the floor of the valley now and the novelties of the walk were over. At the bottom of the slopes there is no longer the same excitement of mountain flowers. All the same there is a glow of colour in 'the meadows and the lower grounds', and one cannot pass them over in silence just because they show more familiar things. Certainly much of what is here one finds on an English country-side, but the density of it all, the lavishness of quantity and colour that runs riot just before hay-time, is strange. The seasons have no niggardly precision; they overlap each other and their children grow side by side. Here are forget-me-nots, pinks, scabious and red hemlock, vetch and clover and bugle, salvia and columbines. And again it is a miscellany of colours, the vetch particularly

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with its lilac and white or full pink blossom intertwining amongst all the rest. But each plant finds out the ground it likes best and covers it suddenly with a sheet of its own flowers that effaces the others. Over a whole meadow the snake-weed lifts its feathery pink-white spires. *Salvia* lines the banks of a wayside path with deep blue. On a barer patch on the side of a rock are the tall puce-coloured pinks with fringed or fray-edged blossoms—the pinks that seem like ‘ragged robin’—very delicate in their make and colour and the most fragrant of any of their tribe. Pick a bunch, if you are lucky enough to find plenty, and put them in a jar with a handful of deep murrey-coloured, dark-purple columbines, and you have a rare blend of light and darkness, gracefulness and height.

There is one floweret of the high places which vies with these pinks in scent. Before the end of June a dark orchis sprinkles its stumpy blossoms among the gentians that are passing over. It is the *nigritella*, with a head like clover, and of the deepest blackish red. These snug little buttons have none of the beauty of their taller and lighter brethren, but they are of a mellow darkness and very soft to the touch; and above all, they have their penetratingly sweet scent—a taste, almost, between that of honey and vanilla. On a bright warm day it is as if the sun breathed through them to this other sense. The peasants have a special liking for them, and stick the dark buttons in their hats on holidays along with the carnations or geraniums of brighter red.

So one may go on enumerating the flowers. But there is something lifeless and abstract in jotting down their bare description and their names. Each, as a matter of fact, was first seen—seen in a way to be remembered—at some particular place; and as the flowers return to memory they are enshrined in that setting. A certain piece of ground is appropriated as a lasting scene in one’s mind, all the more when it has caught the eye as something unsuspected. In that way the Iceland poppy claims as its own two of those defiantly barren places which it favours. One was by the Forcella, above Misurina; the other on the way up from Colfosco to the rocky plateau of Ciampatsch—both similar in their wastes of stone. For it is where all verdure has been left behind and the sun beats down on a rubble of stone and slaty gravel, across which the path cuts its narrow line, that the glinting light catches first one or two, and then it may be a score of flower faces on the steep arid whiteness. At first the dazzle of

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light merely shows that they are there, and then it picks out hues varying from the palest lemon to a glow of orange. But always, with the thin papery texture of the flower, there seems to be a primitive simplicity in the colour, as though it grew—as indeed it does—in places where blossoming nature is reduced to its first elements. It is the counterpart of the purity and clearness of the air, the dry hardness of the rock. Fragile as they seem, the poppies are undaunted natives of that upper wilderness and they volatilize, as it were, the life in it, giving a last touch of sharp colour as one mounts to the desert of limestone which has a neutral fascination of its own.

Coloured lilies, the 'tigers' and martagons, are associated in the same way for me with a particular tract in the Dolomites. These are flowers one looks for and expects to find, and is aggrieved at not finding; but a little difference in the season will upset the reckoning, and you cannot be sure of their being in bloom when they ought to be. It was the punctual abundance of them in one place, the first summer I saw them in the Dolomites, which makes me connect them with that. Probably tiger-lilies, largest and most glowing of wild-flowers, can be ransacked and overpicked; there is a threat of their growing scarcer in consequence. Still, I risk saying how I have seen them flaming on the green heights above 'the great Dolomite road' where it runs through the valley of Livinallongo, because the motorists who dash along that highway are far too absorbed in the whirl of speed to stop. As for the walkers who traverse what comes back to me as a special home of the lilies, over the top of the Incisajoch above Corvara, it may be hoped that they will have been chastened enough by exercise and by the view of Monte Civetta, superb and spiritualized, at the top to pluck with not too brutal hands. On those green heights and elusive wrinkles of the Pralongié, a rival of the Seiseralp, I have seen the lilies at their best. First came the tiger-lilies, with their tawny, red-hearted glow. Their flame is like the note of a clarion and it matches their trumpet shape. As their inspiring blaze died down it was followed by the blooming of the martagons, whose deep wine-red has an assured fullness of high summer. What the martagons lack in brilliance of colour they make up for by this dark richness and their fantastic and yet trim precision of cut. But one has no business to describe the lilies, which neither toil nor spin, in tailoring terms. On the contrary, these are just the flowers, as I remarked earlier, which have something suggestively

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wild in their glory when they grow in the open, not merely adorning but dominating the ground. There is a defiance, almost menacing, in the tightly curled petals and shooting pistils of the martagons which makes them more tiger-like than the tiger-lilies themselves.

But the lilies range over the green slopes in the Dolomites, and if memory happens to tie them to a particular spot, it is only a play of fancy compared to the necessity of nature which confines rarer things to certain places. One of those places is the Padon ridge, that chain of black brittle turrets which forms an outer ward of the Marmolata. This black igneous outbreak among the limestone has flowers of its own, and any one who has read Farrer will recall his passionate excitement over the *Eritrichium nanum* which favours this single ridge. From Pordoi one reaches it practically on the level along its inner grassy side, and the abundance of yellow anemones was what gratified us there first. But the secret and powerful magnet was the eritrichium. We hoped and intended to find it—hardly believing that we should. Ultimately, after not too fierce a scramble, we secured a compact tuft of the dwarf flower. Even a fragment of it in a soap-dish is a heartening sight, and one cannot resist the zest of capture; though as it seems to resist transplantation the virtuous course may be to leave it where it is. The eritrichium makes its own little bed, as it were, and is like a tufted moss starring itself with forget-me-nots of uncommon radiance. It is, you might say, the forget-me-not enhanced and brightened to a really penetrating lustre of light blue: a lustre such as the sky hardly matches in that key of lightness, giving the tiny plant a strength of its own among blue flowers.

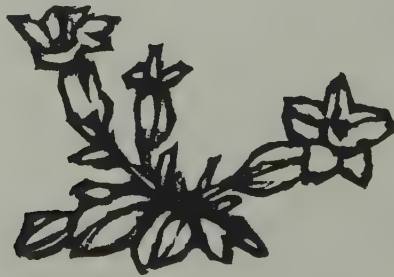
One must be in the Dolomites early to enjoy the whole sequence of these good things. It is only in an uncommonly late summer, as that of 1926 was in the mountains, that crocuses are still to be seen emerging from the snow in mid-July, and in the valley below them hawthorns are in blossom. The first hay-crop demolishes the rich growth of colour in the lower meadows, and with the second comes the relative blankness of August. Before long the bared slopes will be sprinkled again with the light purples of the meadow saffron, delightful to see and gather and yet saddening, because they foretell the end of flowers and the approach of winter. It is not quite the end, however, even at a level of five thousand feet. For surprisingly, in September, when all other such flowers have

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vanished, the Asclepiad gentian shoots up tall and strong as if it cared nothing for time or weather. It is bountiful of its deep-coloured, white-veined flowers. No other gentian is so late and so stalwart; its high firm stalk and spiky pairs of leaves have a mountain vigour.

There will always be rarities enough among the flowers to provide the botanist with motives for search. I have been writing of the pleasure given by things—relatively common things for the most part—as they came. The flowers are an intrinsic part of the beauty of a mountain region. Their colour can hardly be exaggerated, though it may be easy to travesty the colour of the mountains. As in a garden some tints are only seen at their best on a grey evening, so the yellow poppies and tall blue gentians stand out against the mountain masses when these are empty of warm light. But one thinks of most of the flowers as enamelling the grassy spaces, bright under the brightness of the clear and yet delicate Dolomite sky. And noting the many signs of a love of flowers in the people of the country, one can believe that its influence has crept into their ways and arts. The simple but vivacious patterns on their walls, the clear touches of red and blue may have been easily inspired by what every summer shows them.

For short as is the flowering time, it is wonderfully vivid. It brings its own radiance and intensity to contrast with the tenseness of power in the mountain walls. These have their enduring silent life, and the flowers almost articulately renew another, so lovely in its season that it expresses the very spirit and joy of life. They are so pleasant, indeed, that there is no reason to think of anything but themselves. They leave no question and no moral. Still, at their own time they are needed to distil the essence of the region, and to miss them is to miss its moment of completeness.



VIII. INNS

I CALL this a chapter on inns for various reasons. It will not talk about the big hotels. Large hotels are the same in kind all the world over; they differ only in degrees which it might be invidious to specify. I could not do that even if I would, for in the Dolomites I know them almost solely from the outside. From that point of view they command a due respect. An Italian-English tourist circular, meditating on a distant prospect of Cortina, strikes the proper note with a hushed reverence. 'Among the meadows, like cathedrals, the grand hotels are sleeping peacefully.' One cannot say more than that, and if you are in the right frame of mind it is even true. So there let us leave them; they are, indeed, quite capable of taking care of themselves. They furnish the appropriate luxuries or necessities at some very attractive spots. But they are still comparatively few, so that while you can find them nothing is easier than to avoid them if you wish. Far less persistently than in Switzerland do they seize on the coigns of vantage. They have a world of their own which has not annexed much of the world outside; and it is amusing to plunge for an hour into that other world as it disports itself, for instance, in the great prototype of them all at the Karersee.

Just as at Cortina you may retreat from the outlying big hotels and find others of all sizes to the homeliest and smallest in the half-smart, half-shoddy little town, so all through the Dolomites there are varying dimensions. There are the houses of what might be called 'hotel' quality, and the lesser ones of 'inn' quality—if one wants to particularize. But though an 'albergo' might justly feel insulted if it were called a 'locanda', there is no harm in applying generally the good old English term of inn. It marks the modest size and scope of most of them and their genuinely local roots. Inns grow in the Dolomites as well as flowers. For a mountain country it is uncommonly well sprinkled with them, and there can be few such regions where the wanderer is so sure of food and shelter. The chief merit of the inns is that they are clean: a virtue they inherit because the Dolo-

mites are more northern than they seem. Southern influence trims them up and paints them white, provides bright little bedrooms of which one can only complain that the brightness and the inevitable stencilled patterns in each of them are just like the last. Everything grows more uniform. But there are still a good number of houses which keep the braveries and simplicities of the past, and something of their pleasantness should be put on record in case it vanishes.

We came, one hot July afternoon, to an inn on the big Dolomite road whose look invited us to stop and inspect it. I need not mention its name, because any one who goes through the Val di Fassa on that road—which sooner or later every visitor travels—must have noticed it, even if only out of the corner of an eye as a motor whisks him past. The wall that looks down on the dust of the road is rather remarkable. For on this side of the inn has been limned a gigantic St. Christopher, the painting even reaching the top of the windows on the second storey. It has, to be candid, little or none of the artistic quality of some of such frescoes on the churches, but its stature cannot be ignored and its naïve grotesqueness is amusing. The child on the giant's shoulder is podgy, he himself is podgy too, and there is just the hint of a twinkle in his eye. As he was figuring on an inn and not a church, perhaps it was the right embodiment. The accessories, as often, are the most attractive part. A bearded, brown monk held out a lantern at the bottom of the picture; a mermaid gathered her divided tail to her breast, and two duck-like swans rocked on the waves. Below all, as a reminder that it was seriously meant, ran the legend *S. Cristoforo alto forte ci guarda da improvvisa*—the jut of the inevitable new *dépendance* cutting off the rest.

But, though the largest, that was not the most distinguished object on the wall. Between two of the windows, overtopping St. Christopher, there was a tall wooden crucifix with two smaller figures on either side. All were deeply stained by time and weather, etched into blacks and umbers, and all were fine old work. Such was the mixture on the wall. Side by side were the carved tragedy and the unintentional comic of the painting: the solemnity and grotesqueness of the old time looking down together on the dust and scurry of the modern road.

As tourists and moderns, we entered up the wooden stairs into one of those light veranda dining-rooms common to all Tyrolese inns, built on

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to the house. The real and time-honoured entry used by the country folk was through a door below, which led one into a dark cavern-like emptiness where a stranger might have looked in vain for encouragement. Life begins on the first floor, after groping up some heavily-vaulted stone stairs. There is still a dimness even round the bar; one can make out a large picture of the Crucifixion encased in the ceiling. Round this centre are the bustling kitchen, the broad daylight of the restaurant and a cheerful-looking *Stube* or *Schwemme* where the villagers sit to drink.

And what might there be above? We mounted another short, dark stone staircase to look at the rooms. With a massive bit of balustrade on either side at the top, it emerged on to a broad landing with a window at the farther end. At the moment all this was darkness, with the refrigerating shock of those stony depths in old houses, grateful as ice after the blazing heat outside. The shutters were thrown open and we looked back along the length of the landing at whitewashed walls with a faint pattern on them, the doors of half a dozen rooms set back in the wall, the stairs going down between the stumpy pillars of the balusters; and above, framed in deep wavy mouldings and let into the ceiling, a blue and yellow painting of the Madonna, *deiparae Virginis*, with an inscription to say that Nicolas Pellegrin had placed it there to consecrate his house. There was no date, but the painting and lettering looked like seventeenth century.

And then to see the rooms. The first door was opened and showed a room which at once recalled the big crucifix outside. Here there was a small one, above the head of the bed, and the dark brown of it and walnut-brown of the bedstead were in the same tone as the outside carving and, one felt somehow, in the same temper. In the semi-obscurity it looked almost too solemn for a mere stranger to inhabit it; though, after all, it was just a room. Next it was the turn of the larger room opposite. There was the same dimness—we were still blinking from the glare of the afternoon—but we got an alluring impression of panelled walls and ceiling, one or two intriguing objects, size, space and tranquillity—and swiftly made a resolution to come back one day and inhabit that room.

We took stock of it when we carried out the resolve two years later and found, of course, that we had exaggerated its wonders a little. In the grey July of our second visit there was not much left of those depths of cool shadow and exhilarating shafts of sun. A hard light showed up every-

thing; the ceiling wanted cleaning; an untimely white blotch showed where the process had begun and been left off. The furniture was mixed, some of it incongruously new, and the stove especially was defiantly ugly.

But somehow the room triumphed over all these inferiorities, and made a kind of atmosphere by the softness of its colouring. The panelled walls were washed over in pale green and the door and little wall-cupboards picked out in a blue that was also pale, but brighter. The shallow pilasters, or suggestions of pilasters, which were the only moulding on the wood, had been painted grey; each of them had a small 'cartouche' of deep red near the top. The ceiling panels were grey except in the middle of the room, where their compartments opened into an inset shaped like a quatrefoil—a little flower-piece on a primrose ground. It was all very discreet and the wear of time had made it more so, but all the modest decoration had an instinctive rightness in its colour—the matching of the pale green and blue, the touches of red on the grey. It was a chaster effect than is common in the Dolomites, and it had even more of the coolness one usually finds in the decorations there.

And certainly this half-diluted colour must have had an influence, or some of the curious objects in the room would have been more assertive. There was no mistaking the dominant one—a large mirror with an elaborate gilded frame and a pair of eagles snarling outwards at the top of its convolutions. The mirror hung above the wash-handstand and jutted at such an angle that what you saw most clearly were your legs; but one forgave the jut and the difficulties of shaving because it was plainly the right attitude for this emphatic and really striking piece. Next it, on the top of a cupboard a huge stuffed capercailzie screamed mute defiance at the eagles from an open mouth. It was the only sinister thing in the room, and so high up that strong daylight was needed to appreciate its plumage. Beyond it in the corner, enclosed in a glass case, was the model of a white village. It looked at first like one of those delightful *Krippen*—wondrous scenes of rocks and hills and buildings which are the setting for an elaborate Nativity and coming of the Magi: a by-way of popular art in which South Germany and South Italy rivalled each other. But the model in the room was simply a miniature of the village. There was recognizably the inn itself, with St. Christopher and the crucifix on its walls; and behind all, as in life, the huge boulder which one could almost step on to from



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the back windows and which looked as if it could pulverize the inn. When one woke up in the morning one's eyes rested first on the capercailzie and then caught a reassuring glint from the toy houses. It may have been the looming bird which accounted for the phantasmagoric dreams that visited me from time to time in that room. But they did not prevent deep and restful slumbers. It was impossible not to think of the room as friendly, though the past hung there almost visibly, steeping it in long-continued habitation. But there was a spare, clean space about it. The dust of memories had dissolved into peace, and the big landing outside was the centre of that quiet; a well of silence and coolness on which neither the glare of the road nor the rattle of the cars had any effect.

The potency of rooms is very great. Even at an inn, that mere temple of migration, a happy find of this sort may be nearly as persuasive as fine country or fine weather, inviting you to stay. The first time we came to the Dolomites we stepped straight from that devastating motor drive recorded in an earlier chapter into a room certainly uncommon of its kind. If anything could have been a lucky omen it was that the first room we slept in, the very first interior we saw, was this. Luck it was, for we did not choose; we simply happened to be first comers in a hostelry less capacious then than it is now. The 'Zirm' has expanded since, taken to itself *dépendances* and added house to house, but at the core of the old building there is still the room. It was of cembra wood, sweet-smelling, with three deep-set windows; in the midst of the panels of the ceiling was a sunken one with a big rayed star inlaid in grey and white. The solid door had an armoury of steel locks and bolts. It looked like what it certainly had been, an ancestral family bedchamber and the heart of the house. But its light wood and bright windows made it permanently cheerful. We hailed it with an astonished joy and sank into it for I am ashamed to say how many weeks. Why—with first-rate country also—should one move? When I saw the room again some years later it seemed a little more modernized and filled up; or perhaps it was only that I had seen so many more old rooms between. But probably the hand of change will not go much further.

There has been a great deal in this book about rooms, but this is the end of detail. There shall only be a last word about the general pleasantness of those wooden rooms of which this one was so handsome a specimen. It is not too often now that you find such in the Dolomites.

When you do they offer something to remember. It is the clean simplicity of the unvarnished walls and the mellow aroma that lurks in them, not hanging heavily like a scent, but hardly noticed till the sun glows and warms the panels. You nestle snugly in a fragrant box which opens to the freshness outside it. In one admirable inn that I know all the rooms are of this species, and when the landlord recently added a dozen more they were still of the same pattern. It was the cheapest, no doubt, but that was not what he was mainly thinking of. He liked the house as it was and meant to stick to its character, although he had the means and the chance—as it stands at a very desirable spot—of transforming it into an hotel of the approved machine-made model.

And really, if you can tear yourself from a slavery to bath-rooms and hot and cold water taps, these inns are delectable. They provide 'change' in the form of simplicity, and on the whole with a minimum of the difficulties which invest anything foreign to one's habits. There are small unfamiliarities—incommodities even—or there would not be change. When I said that you could nestle in these rooms, it might be rejoined that you may have to wrestle with your bed-clothes. I don't fancy that in the Dolomites these ever take the extreme Teutonic form, but sheets and blankets tend to be rigorously short and narrow. There you come on a national cleavage. The English notion of bed-clothes is that they should tuck into the bed, but the German, Austrian, and by assimilation the Tyrolese treats himself as the bed and simply rolls the bed-clothes round him. And as the bed-clothes respond to this method and you do not, there may be exposed surfaces by the morning. But you need never freeze, for there is the huge eiderdown under which it is easier to stifle. To me those billowing masses of intractable softness mainly suggest nightmare. But you can cast them off or—though awkwardly, for it is not their nature—have a part of them; and after all it is solacing to think that the bitterest night cannot prevail against them. The times, however, when I have rejoiced in them have been bitter days—those wintry days of driving snow which unaccountably insert themselves into summer—when one can simply retire under them and treat the bed as a sofa.

Italian rule in the Dolomites may bring longer sheets, but it means bad pillows. The German likes a reasonably soft pillow, the Italian is happiest when it is as hard as wood, and this may make other visitors less happy.

Sometimes there is a way of dealing with the difficulty. At one inn where we happened to bewail that taste for hard pillows, the other variety was at once forthcoming. Policy had dictated that there should be hard pillows on the beds, but there was a supply of Austrian pillows in reserve and it furnished us with two milder specimens.

It is not in English that you will ask for these things. Except in the larger hotels, the visitor must deal in Italian or German. I have only come across two innkeepers in the smaller houses who knew, or tried to know, English. One, whom I met first as he was walking on the hills with his gun, surprised me with a flow of English conversation. He has spent three years in London and is eager to welcome English guests to his little hotel on the pass of Campolungo. The other, a stalwart, attractive, slightly melancholy being, wrestled sadly and alone with an English grammar. I found he had made small progress in two years; there was no one for him to practise on.

'What will you eat?' were the only words of English known to our best friend among landlords or landladies. What you do eat varies rather with the region—more Italian fare in the south, more German in the northern places. Risottos are always to be had, and polenta is a staple food of the peasants everywhere in the Dolomites. Omelettes—at least in name—also abound, but outside the native Italian zone must be watched with caution. The Tyrolese idea of an omelette is that it should contain not *finer herbes* but a copious quantity of jam; that it should be sweet, in fact, and probably heavy; and unless you have made your order obstinately clear a sad disappointment is in store for you. The soups are often good and various; one inn, which was small but had an inheritance of family recipes, managed to provide a different one for every day in the week and all were excellent. The most particularly Tyrolese soup, for which at its best the stranger, especially when he is hungry, acquires a taste, is 'dumpling soup', *Knödelsuppe*. And here again, if you ask, be sure that you get it, as only a nicety of pronunciation separates its name from one entirely different. If, for instance, you say anything that can be construed as *Nudelsuppe* (and your host will think it much more likely that you want the cosmopolitan macaroni rather than the country dumpling), there will come a rather savourless thin soup with drifting swathes of vermicelli. The other soup, though also 'clear', derives spice and substance from the

presence of savoury balls or little dumplings made of rice, herbs, eggs, meat—in fact of everything. It is the waitress's art to pour the soup out of its bowl and finally launch the dumpling into one's plate without splashing. The cook's art is to compound a *Knödel* that will have savour, substance, and yet lightness. Certainly the dumplings are apt to be too solid, but alleviated by the soup they are a compact way of meeting hunger. At one small inn the local passion for them involved us in a tragi-comedy of *Knödels*. We had asked for soup, and eggs or an omelette. A tureen was presently brought in with a bevy of dumplings of the largest size permissible. We managed about one and a half between us; it was the next course, naturally, on which we were staking. What was our disgust, then, to find it had all been in the soup! The simple peasants had made the meal simplicity itself by compressing eight eggs into the dumplings.

My only criticism of Dolomite fare is that there is too much meat, as usually happens with foreign diets. It is a perpetual surprise to the native that beef-fed Englishmen should eat less, and especially less meat, than a German or Italian. The visitor, at any rate, will get more than enough to make bone and sinew for his walking; and the people, once they have discovered what you like, will generally alter their dishes to your fancy. With luck, if you are near the mountain streams, you will get capital little trout for supper.

The last characteristic item on the bill of fare is *Torte*. Every one who knows Germany or Austria knows what a *Torte* is, and both Italians and English have found it seductive. It is merely scamping the matter to say the *Torte* is a cake, a large flat cake partitioned in long slices. The essence of it lies in all the differing variations—from the dark richness of *Chocoladetorte* or the lighter tinge of walnut to the hard-baked crispness of a *Linzertorte*. Each has its hour and predestined affinities. It is no use denying that we like these things; the tea-shop is more peculiar to Britain than the tavern, and we are all secretly amateurs of such confections. What is unexpected is to find 'cake', in this sense, constituting the last course at dinner. It becomes, however, a pleasant habit, more welcome than the repeated compote, if less desired than mountain strawberries; and it lends itself still more to that preoccupation of the English abroad—the provision of materials for tea.

In fact the prospect of a superfine chocolate specimen was one of the

inducements that led us at times, for tea after a half-day's walk, to the 'refuge' once well known as the Regensburgerhütte (now under the care of the Alpinists of Florence). It sounds grossly material, but it shows the resources of these places. The primary object of this club-hut is to shelter climbers who mean to attack the Gaisler pinnacles next morning. But it is worth an expedition for its own sake—standing just under the peaks and stony heights on the last strip of the high meadows, which fold into all sorts of steep, engaging wrinkles. The guardian was a person one remembers; stalwart and efficient, he served you with a quiet promptness, a rather distinguished silence and courtesy. When you wished to talk he would tell you all you wanted to know. As guide, he took climbers up the neighbouring needles, and with the same trained service would mix drinks and lay provisions before those who merely dropped in for lunch or tea. The way in which these refuges are equipped may astonish those who are used to the rigours of mountaineering huts in Switzerland. No discourse about inns can ignore them, for they are really hostelries of a special and transitory kind. They lie lower, of course, than the ultimate Swiss refuges, but some are remote enough. The Bambergerhütte, for instance, which perches under Boé amid the solitary blocks of the Sella—a five hours' walk and climb to get out either way—is furnished at the beginning of the season with bedding which must be dragged up by hand that distance over rocks and snow, and is provisioned every week through the summer in the same way. And the Dolomite standard in these matters may be indicated by one tiny detail. The landlord of the Cappella at Colfosco, who is the proprietor of the refuge, noted sternly that its equipment was *not* complete in one point. There were no tea-strainers (which to a foreign eye are almost more essential than the tea). I am not sure even if there was a sufficient multitude of cups; at any rate there is a good deal of washing up to be done on fine days at the Bambergerhütte, for as it lies midway on the route over the Sella the expeditions from either starting-point intersect there.

Refuges in the Dolomites are like inns for two reasons. One is that they have been planted out among the mountains by Austrians and Germans with a characteristic thoroughness, and an attention to creature comforts which is no less characteristic of those peoples and of the Tyrolese. The new régime, though it involves a change of owners or at least of su-

periors, does not visibly amount to much more at present than a change of names. The 'Hütte' becomes a 'rifugio', and is christened by an Italian place-name instead of a German one. The Alpinists of Italy seem to have appropriated the refuges with zest and have distributed them among the clubs or branches of different places, each of which has one under its care. Tariffs are posted up with the exactitude which the Italy of to-day displays in these matters. It only remains to be seen whether the huts that went to pieces in the war will be restored.

But the chief reason why these refuges have a hospitable and inn-like nature is because they are where they are. Their plenty matches the accessible nature of the country. For the Dolomites, with all their splintered peaks and rock masses, are moderate mountains, seldom touching the eternal snows and ice; and they are inviting to walk about and handy to climb for reasons which have been already mentioned. It is partly because of the suddenness with which they rise from the grass or from their bases of stone—entailing a steep walk, may be, but no slow progress over ice to reach them. And still more, for the non-climber, it is because they abound so in passes and high tracks which take you far nearer to the summits than you have any right to expect, and let you cross, not once but twice in a day, from one valley and landscape to another wholly different, or again seclude yourself for hours in the silence of high places. It is on the Rosengarten that this mountain desertness is most combined with easy and hospitable access. The Vajolet refuge, one of the amplest and best furnished, stands right under its strange towers and close to the secrets of its final passes. Perhaps it is not wholly a misfortune that the Antermoia refuge on the other side should be abandoned still; it leaves the remoteness of that wild amphitheatre unbroken. In fact the hospices seldom infringe one's sense of solitude. Yet as we are considering inns and refuges just now rather than solitudes, it is merely truth to say again that the Dolomites are uncommonly well provided with these havens.

A neat wooden cubicle accommodates you for the night in the refuges. In some of them you are expressly enjoined to go to bed by ten o'clock, to abstain from talking after that and be quiet in rising. These obvious maxims are something of a trial to the Italian temperament. Of good food and drink you are sure unless you come to some high point at the end of the season. That was what we did at the Egererhütte in the walk described

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before; but even so what we found there would have seemed to ascetic mountaineers the last of a sheer plenty.

It is only right, after all, that the higher you go the more the grosser supports should dwindle. And one's actual climb from the earth's floor might almost be measured by the size and resources of the nearest refuge. On the lower, easier passes they become indistinguishable from inns. On the Sellajoch, where there is a carriageable road, the refuge turns into a hotel, small and simple. So from the Bambergerhütte in its rocks and snows to the village *Gasthaus* or *locanda* and thence to the 'cathedrals' of Cortina runs a flexible chain of accommodation. It will not be the fault of the Dolomite inns if one faints by the way; and whether as ports in a storm, harbours at the end of the day or anchorages where one may rest for weeks, they are generally equal to what is asked of them.



IX. VISITORS

ONE OF the pains or pleasures, or at any rate of the sure effects of traveling, is that it constantly alters your value in your own eyes and in those of other people. Consider the English tourist at Victoria waiting for the boat-express to start; he is gay, confident, master of the right clothes, the right newspaper, the right tip for the porter. The lady or gentleman of Continental extraction lurks, by comparison, mouse-like in the background; a little dim, a little on sufferance. But observe the law of changing values. He, or she, must increase while the Englishman will diminish. Already on the boat, especially if it is a French boat, the foreigner shows an expanding assurance, while our countryman is intermittently fussed with thoughts of money or tickets. By the time they land, the wheel has come full circle. The foreigner, no longer a foreigner, is victoriously at home. The English try not to be uneasy.

But the plunge has been taken, and no matter how experienced, knowing, or reckless they are, they will never be the equals of the foreigner-at-home, never have his unpremeditated rightness. They will remain secretly, if not visibly, at a disadvantage until they reach the same point on the return journey. Then, even while speeding through the fields of France—there seem to be always more English in the trains from Paris than there are foreigners in the trains from London—they feel, whatever the look of the weather, a sense of moral security softly rising round them, and it grows until it dissolves into a rich haze of peace at Dover. Nothing they can do now will be wrong, for they are in a perfect equilibrium with their environment.

I have dwelt on this at some length because it seems to lead to the essential fact about tourists and even travellers. They are always in a position of inferiority. Curiously enough, this is one of the objects for which people travel, as it is only the other side of a delightful strangeness, even of a helplessness that may be fascinating at times, as when you are alone in a Czech or Polish town without knowing a single word of the

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language. But if the place is strange to you, so you are equally strange to its inhabitants. And just as the question for the natives is what they will make of your strangeness, so the question for the foreigner is what he will do with his inferiority.

For whether he is aware of it or not, this secret law will operate. In our own case, for example, it is not upset by an Englishman's inevitable assumption of *his* superiority, which goes its way with a calm and haughty indifference to foreign speech and manners. What can be plainer than that the Continentals shepherd the proud islander with the same tolerant care that one bestows on the insane? Even the brilliant young men and maidens who may sustain the picture of us as a superior race are still doing it upon sufferance, sporting over crevasses of toleration. Yet on the whole we come fairly well out of the difficulty. We are less impatient, less angry now, except when the conflict with foreign methods or manners becomes really shocking. Whether we are cool or shy—and indeed the coolest of us abroad are shy at bottom—we make no secret of our ignorance. We are and like to think we are independent, innocent and frank, confident that our honest intentions will be as plain to others as to ourselves.

In the Dolomites, I think, this does happen. The inhabitants—it is a way, perhaps, of mountain peoples—show a kindness for the English. It may be that they perceive some traits in us which resemble theirs; some, at any rate, which they can understand. Then we are worth encouraging because we still have some flavour of rarity; they do not see too much of us. Except in the big Cortina hotels or on the great 'bus route in August, English and American frequenters of the mountains are comparatively few and far between. One may spend weeks and even months in the Dolomites without hearing an English voice. So the encounter with a fellow countryman may become almost exciting; and on the other hand, in spite of the copious advertisements of tours and agencies, it is still a place where one can escape from one's own tribe.

The natives of the Dolomites seem curiously agreed as to what is the salient British quality. We are so delightfully, restfully 'quiet'. *So ruhig*—uttered with an appreciative smile—is the epithet I have heard again and again as summing up the matter. It comes out now and then in a really touching way. We went into a shop in Brunico one day to buy some biscuits and complete the provisions for an outdoor lunch, and having

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made an absurdly small purchase were just going off when the woman who kept the shop grasped us by the hand with a look of almost devouring affection. 'You are English, aren't you?' We admitted it. Then she explained. She had been in service years before in one of the Cortina hotels, and she still liked to think of the English visitors who were so quiet, so admirably restrained, apparently, in their behaviour as compared with that of other guests. 'They never made an exhibition of themselves'—*Sie machten kein Spektakel im Hotel*. Let us hope it is still true. For undoubtedly it is something more than our linguistic muteness that the inhabitants are thinking of when they bring out their *so ruhig* with a sympathetic, faintly quizzical smile.

We are restful, curiously restful to them after strident Germans and vociferous Italians: they certainly mean that. Besides this, I have heard them attribute another quality to us which we ought to appreciate, for it seems to echo one of our hardest-worked words. Besides being so quiet the English can also be 'so nice' (*so nett*). That was the special tribute from the landlady of our mountain inn, with whom we had a pretty candid intimacy, to the two parties of English youths (the first quite ignorant of languages and localities) who came in there for a night. They were almost unexampled visitors; I fancy she had seen none of the kind before.

These are, of course, the pleasant things that are said about ourselves to us. What, exactly, they may say of us to the Italians and Germans we can never know. But there is one belief which seems to survive among all minor shades of difference, and again we ought to value it as it coincides with an opinion of our own. We suppose ourselves to be honest, whatever else we may not be: and the people in the Dolomites corroborate us by clinging to the same belief in English honesty. One instance of it that came my way was quite involuntary and almost touching, as it came from a woman with whom I quarrelled and whom I could not pay. It was in the Italian-speaking Dolomites. Four of us had arrived one evening at one of the inns on the top of a well-known pass. We knew that owing to a change of plans we should be running it fine in the matter of money. We gave some inkling of this to the landlady. There was nothing handsome, certainly, about the food or lodging. What was our horror, then, next morning to find that the bill exceeded our wildest fears of the possible; this miserable hostelry was charging more than our smart,

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delightful hotel at Bolzano. There was an acrimonious and futile wrangle over the bill, at the end of which we remained a hundred *lire* in the lady's debt. On one side were the unknown, penniless English, forty miles from their base; on the other a defiant being—intent on the last *centesimo*—of whom we could not conceal our dislike. I thought the collection of her exorbitant dues would afford her some anxiety. Not in the least; she took it for granted that when we got back I should hand the money to a 'bus conductor in a distant valley, who would presently deliver it to her. Some may fancy she was practising on my innocence, but the transaction seemed to me to show the rarest faith in the honesty of all concerned.

In the simpler places, at any rate, the English do not get any special attention because they are supposed to be rich. Most of us who visit them travel in a very modest way. The peasants know that London is the largest of all cities—it is the one fact about England that they do know—and they are ever eager to hear how many millions it contains. It is a fearful joy to the mountain villagers to hear of anything so big. But they do not admire the idea, nor are they abject worshippers of riches, however canny they may be. They marvel at our persistence in coming so far to the mountains, for the length of the journey is always exaggerated and they are hazy about the sea. But all signs of a genuine liking for their mountains, of energy in climbing or exploring them, find a way to their hearts. And there has been a very respectable tradition of English mountaineering in the Dolomites since Tucker began it half a century ago, though I have heard guides complain that there are not enough English climbers now.

We walk, at any rate, not so copiously as the Germans, but still enjoyably; and that is reckoned to our credit. The English in the Dolomites have generally done this, although naturally their obscure joys and efforts are not commemorated like the feats of the mountaineers. One of the very first English explorers of the Dolomites was that once famous divine and preacher, Robertson of Brighton, who came there in the middle of the last century. Among other things he performed the rather singular feat of walking from Corvara to Bolzano in a day. I reckon his route at about thirty-five miles. There seems nothing extraordinary in this, perhaps; a good many of us have done our thirty miles and more in like country and gone up a mountain—Scottish or English—on the way. But Robert-

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son was suffering, or recovering, from a nervous breakdown: he had sprained a sinew two days before and the tracks were slippery with melting snow. The guide-porter who was with him retired exhausted at Kastelruth and he finished the enterprise alone.

But for energy, so far at least as visible signs may measure it, the Germans bear the palm. I use 'Germans' as a generic term to include the Austrians, who may be still the greater number, for they are the neighbours and till yesterday were the rulers of this South-Tyrolese land. As they are the kinsmen of the people in the German-speaking valleys of the Dolomites, they can hardly be called strangers. They are at home with the people and the people are at home with them, and appreciate the fervid activity of the younger and the perseverance of the old. There is a full past behind all this. It was the Austrian and German alpinists who mapped out the Dolomites as a field of recreation, explored the ascents, made the club-huts or refuges and marked the mountain paths. The old names of many of the refuges, such as the Regensburgerhütte or the Bambergerhütte, show from how far they came. Every one who now visits the Dolomites enjoys the fruits of those labours, and the Italians merely carry on what they began.

A few years ago it looked as if the time-honoured inflow of German tourists might be coming to an end. For up from the other side, the south, came the counter-wave of Italian visitors, pouring in to explore and take possession of the new territory which had fallen to them as a result of the war. And before this impact of the conquerors the conquered naturally gave place. There were German visitors, early birds in sparse numbers, up to the middle of July; but from that moment when the Italian holidays begin until the end of September when they stop, the northern comers obliterated themselves before the southern. The visitors everywhere were Italian and there was hardly a German to be seen. But there has been a change again since then. The Italian wave has receded a little, as the first full wave of interest and propaganda spent itself. No doubt the Italian tourists outnumber the German and have some places to themselves, but last time I noticed that the Teutonic visitors had come back and abounded all through the summer season. It is all for the good of the innkeepers, who were exceedingly depressed after the war at the loss of their usual clients. And for us, the other visitors, it is really more amusing.

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For one cannot but be amused by a vision which, in one way or other, is so vividly true to type. If you happen to have come by Innsbruck, you will recognize, in many of these migrants, the fulfilment of Innsbruck's dream. In summer-time that town seethes and bubbles on the verge of holiday. You alight from the train and find yourself in a fancy world of men in bright blue or chequer-patterned linen jackets, hard-rubbed leathern 'shorts', and braces, or rather immense breast-bands, of embroidered green. The young are mostly bare-headed, but when a hat is worn it must have the little cockade like a shaving-brush—the 'Gemsensbart' or whatever it may be—which is in the inveterate sporting tradition. The girls, often in dainty flower-sprigged dresses, have bare brown arms and necks, but heavy boots and stockings.

And always, behind this gaiety of motley, there is the sight and suggestion of weighty ruck-sacks. The knobbly weight of them, the thoroughness of the whole equipment, are always impressive to an English eye. The Teutonic method proclaims its purpose and tends to extremes. We, with our 'animated moderation', aim at a style which may suit as many varieties of weather as possible and at colours that merge into the ground. The Teuton commits himself more. It was wonderful to see a party preparing to advance on the snows of Marmolata, men and women wrapped in great swathes of clothes, battened down with knapsacks and made fast with coils of rope, until it seemed that rotation could be their only form of movement. This time, although the effect was more Arctic than Alpine, there was certainly an excuse for the appendages, especially the ice-axe. It is the frequency of this implement that becomes something of a puzzle in the Dolomites. There are few spots which offer any employment for it in the height of summer, but the German tourist grasps one almost as persistently as the peasant-woman clings to her umbrella. Is it from ignorance or hopefulness or the enjoyment of an ideal? I believe it to be mainly the last; the axe has ceased to be a tool and is frankly a badge or a symbol, as necessary to the imagination of the tourist as a pair of boots is to his feet. It unites him to a brotherhood of adventure, and with it at hand he can dream of the highest ardours on the mildest walk. It is the poetry while the pack is heavy prose. The pack, one feels, whether on the back or off it, can be seldom out of mind. There is a conclusive sign in the way people will

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come down fully strapped with it to breakfast, remove it for a few minutes and then put it on again.

On the other hand, the tendency to extremes shows itself in a revulsion against clothes, even if one may not rebel against the pack. It is characteristic of the Germans that, unlike us, they prefer to carry their clothes rather than wear them; and so one may see a bare-chested, bare-armed figure, wearing but a thin zephyr and bending under the weight of the pack and all the clothes, slung over it, which he is *not* wearing. It may be the right method, though it does not seem to ease the limbs; the portage is in any case magnificent. But the next step is to do without clothes. We were sitting in a wood not far from Misurina when there flashed past us what I can best describe as a human gleam—the fleshy gleam or glitter of three cyclists, each nude except for what appeared to be a pair of bathing-drawers and the inevitable ruck-sack on his back. One of them also wore a full black beard. It was such a swift and amazing apparition that I should have supposed it a dream if it had not been seen simultaneously by two of us. The nude cyclists we have never seen again; and in spite of a secret wish to see them I do not feel their style is really suited to the road or the wheel. Things depend on place and time. I felt a rather envious admiration for three Austrians, encountered on a high mountain path, who went bare of everything (except the ruck-sack) above the waist. They were fine athletic fellows, and in those sunny solitudes they looked as if they were out to run or wrestle with the rough changes of the ground. To strip is, of course, a note of German physical culture; at any rate it suits real summer and the young. I see in memory a delightful group of boys and girls of flaxen fairness, but with their skins tanned very brown, tossing a football about in a woodland clearing near a lake; yet it was not so much because of the lake, one felt, that they lived in bathing-suits, as because they were summering in a wood.

There are indeed all gradations, all varieties from gaiety to grimness, in what seemed a constant type. Where the sun blazes down on a stony pass you may meet a party of those Innsbruckers a little sobered: two men, say, and two maidens browned or rather crimsoned and peeled now by the August rays; tired, silent, streaming with the heat, yet manifestly achieving something. They may not be going farther than you are, or have climbed higher or moved faster; but there is no doubt that they

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started earlier and carry a great deal more. Yet they feel they are doing it thoroughly and are quite content.

The Germans, at any rate, make the most of their holiday, and few are perhaps as serious as they seem. How they enjoy themselves and how artless some of them are! I have before me an article from the *Allgemeine Bergsteiger-Zeitung*, in which that journal relaxes and gives quite a humorous natural history of the various types. Here is its portrait of the

‘COMMON WANDERVOGEL (*puer montanus communis*).

‘Lives and roams in company, has bare knees and never any covering on the head; skin colouring various, for the most part reddish-brown; the sun, moon and stars reflect their gleams in his leathern breeches. Gaiety and a voracious appetite are the best identification marks. Strong, fully-grown specimens carry a lute with coloured ribbons, but on this they are seldom able to play. This type affects a sinuous movement and appears always in company with the following species, the

‘WANDERMÄDEL (*puella montana communis*).

‘These agile and pleasing little creatures can always be known by their bare calves, baby faces and bobbed hair. Plumage indeterminate in colour, generally grey, brownish and speckled with brighter hues. They never come out singly, but always in large bands: find everything perfectly entrancing or perfectly ghastly, and always have secrets among themselves.’

And as contrasting types the writer describes the *homo ferox alpinus* and the ‘hermit crab’ (*cancer solitarius*)—among whom one recognizes those wild or morose visitors who can fill a refuge-hut with a puzzled alarm or depression.

For a last contrast I think of an unobtrusive little Austrian family, noticeable all the same because they were pleasant to look at and so tremendously enjoying a big walk: father and mother, both youngish, and three children of whom the eldest might have been thirteen and the youngest eight or nine. They had passed our inn before breakfast, making for the Valparola pass; in the afternoon we overtook them beyond that and beyond Falzarego, among the rocks under the Cinque Torri; they were still going nimbly and would spend the night in a refuge. Next morning we saw them returning down our valley to their own inn, having crossed

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two passes long before midday. They were a delightful party, who enjoyed each other and the game of the long walk; and the remarkable thing was the way they held together in spite of halts for the benefit of the youngest.

We met another 'little family' one day, who were botanizing on the Lusia Pass. These were Italians, rather older than the Austrians, but just as attractive in their intelligent good looks. With the nicest people, the gulfs between nations vanish. Yet the difference of type remains, and one does not picture most of the Italian visitors to the Dolomites absorbed in anything so quiet as the search for flowers on a mountain-side. Being Latins, they have no yearning as a race for the loneliness of nature. They are social and demonstrative and bent on communication in all senses of the word. Lazy visitors satisfy the impulse by doing little and enjoying a great deal of talk. But the energetic ones—and energy of some kind is the cherished virtue of the new Italy—are bent on movement, as much of it and as fast as possible. So they have achieved what one might call the motorization of the Dolomites. This is certainly the outstanding feature of Italian 'tourism'. It has created a network of omnibus routes and motor services and let loose a stream of private cars along the mountain roads. There are German motorists among them, but they are far outnumbered by the Italians, who display an *élan* and even a seriousness in this pursuit which the Germans cannot rival.

The Italians of to-day are a motoring people. No slower tempo will appease their desire; and it must find room for lively hazards to satiate their daring. We, cautious and nervous northerners, who have quivered at their forward sweep round hair-pin bends or gasped at their short way with precipices, have to admire a bravado that seems justified by skill and Providence. Rarely—indeed to be accurate only once—have I seen the shattered fragments of a motor-bus lying at the bottom. It is a great sport and one would view it with purely admiring wonder if only it were a little quieter. But that is what it cannot, will not be, and what apparently no Italian-driven car will consent to. There must be noise as well as speed, and one fancies that on any other terms the car's motion would seem as unreal to its owner as the bodiless vision of a cinema. The deadly rattle of the exhaust goes on; but nobody seems to mind—or hardly anybody. I qualify the remark because it was at the entry to Dobbiaco (Toblach),



13 A PEASANT'S HOUSE

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I think, that I was thrilled with sympathy at seeing a white banner stretched across the road with the inscription:

SCIAPPATORE CHIUSO
AUSPUFF GESCHLOSSEN

—an admonition which seems equally expressive in either language.

Speaking humanly, the noise of the cars is perhaps only one sign of a defiant demonstrativeness which has overtaken the Italian character. It is a phase of national self-consciousness, sensitive and eager, which one should understand with sympathy whether one likes or dislikes it. They have always expressed themselves vividly, and now they want to be sure that their expression is not lost upon other people. This may account for some of the lively and insistent din that ensues when an Italian party bursts into a mountain inn which may have been 'silent as a standing pool' before they arrived. It is astonishing how one party can multiply itself, not merely in sound by cries and chatter, but by occupying physically tables, doorways, and passages until there is no refuge save one's bedroom. But some air of possessiveness is natural in the new territory, even if the foreigner has to submit to it a little as well as the native. Besides painful moments one can be sure of pleasant ones, and I remember equally days and even weeks where one abode happily under the same roof with ideal fellow-visitors.

In all the really Italian region of the Dolomites, like Cortina and the country south of it, the Pala group or the Fassa valley, the Italians are at home. In the German-speaking parts the conquerors must have something of the air of strangers. And however briskly the Italianizing of south Tyrol goes on, there remains a difference of habits, distinguishing Italian visitors from German. The German mania for walking is not theirs. All Germans walk and some Italians do, one might put it loosely but not untruly. Italy, of course, has now and has long had her distinguished mountaineers. One big block in the Dolomites—the Sella—bears the name of an Italian expert; and perhaps no European, except Dolomieu himself, has given his name to such a solid mountain mass. It was to an Italian traveller and sportsman, who knew every peak and by-way in the Dolomites, that I owed the first pleasure of getting off the beaten tracks. None the less, as compared with the perambulating Teutons, the

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majority of Italian visitors seem to be sedentary or motor-borne. To the non-Italian natives this is bound to appear an inferiority—in the sense in which I have used that term. It is not what they have been used to. They understand the Germans with packs and big fanged boots who are for ever tramping. It shows their appreciation of their own country that they do understand them, as otherwise all this effort and fatigue might well strike them as a little absurd. One knows the quizzical attitude towards restless visitors. But the peasants in the Dolomites are mountain folk, who know that their country cannot be really seen and enjoyed without some effort and some solitude. And that is why their attitude to the Italian visitors who sit and chatter happily for hours and saunter mildly to and fro may well be a little ironic. They are not used to the towny clothes of the men or the high-heeled shoes of the ladies. And certainly a good many Italian visitors whom I have seen are not used to the mountains. As with other nationalities, it is very much a question of class. One village where I have stayed seemed an unsophisticated solitude till the middle of July. Then there swept into it a great influx of Italian visitors of the middle class—rather decidedly the lower than the upper middle—with the result that the natural characteristics of the place were obliterated. Instead there was an atmosphere of the cheap seaside. This, up to a point, was quite amusing. It would have been still more so if there had been no doubt that the visitors really enjoyed it themselves. But that was exactly what one could not be sure of. What were they after? Nothing, apparently, that nature, mountains or activity could provide; nothing, in fact, that any garish little resort could not have furnished much better. We were rather sorry for them in the end.

After all, one does not expect a true Latin to be so sympathetic to wild and lonely nature as a northerner. And perhaps the impulse towards solitude does not get much encouragement in contemporary Italy. The Italians like the support and company of their kind. We had a startling manifestation of that in the woods near Seis one day when there suddenly debouched on to the path a band of some fifty Italians of both sexes and most ages; hot, weary, but triumphant from a day and a night on the heights of the Schlern. They looked like a tribe, but were only a club or 'circle'. It had all been gleefully and gregariously done and seemed true to temperament. But it was a sign, all the same, that the Italians mean to

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conquer the mountains. The number of Italian walkers and climbers in the Dolomites visibly increases. Why, indeed, should their energy not devote itself to mountains as well as motors? It seems an omen that a distinguished Alpinist actually occupies the Holy See. As the first wave of curiosity passes it will be with the Italians as with most other visitors to the Dolomites. Only those who really care for the mountains will go there, and they will enjoy them in the best way.



X. THE CHANGING YEARS

IDEALLY, a mountain country should know no change. The mountains are images of timelessness to us, as time-fretted creatures; and probably this reason is at the bottom of the others which make them refreshing. A mountain that *moves*, even by fractions of an inch, like the one near Bellinzona, is a portent that stirs Governments to act and transport, perhaps, whole villages away from an incredible disaster. We do not move mountains ourselves by faith, although Trotsky the Bolshevik believes that we shall one day deal with them by art and science and remodel nature more suitably. In the same way—the extremes meeting—Signor Mussolini has declared that within ten years the features of Italy would no longer be recognizable. Short of such vaulting ambitions as these, our importunate affections can and do change nature. The love of mountains, like the crude instinct in man, has been generally possessive. Climbers conquer them, and that does no harm; it is the feat of a vanishing moment. But funiculars and hotels lay a lasting siege to them. It is a mixed blessing, inevitable, and we should receive it with calm were it not for one thing which makes the process look endless. What really threatens the peace of the mountains most is the growing crowd-impulse. We live among crowds, and are mostly uneasy when alone. We even ‘retreat’ into solitude by companies. And so the remoteness of the mountains, another incomparable boon of theirs, grows rarer when it is most worth having.

Whether it will make much difference to the Dolomites that they have passed into the hands of the most gregarious and sociable people in Europe, is not yet easy to say. It is a special case, which, for reasons suggested in the last chapter, I fancy may find its own level. They are, too, as was said, almost innocent at present of monster hotels, though roads and motors do multiply. Nor are they the sort of mountains that lend themselves to funiculars. Yet change there is; in fact, I have never known the Dolomites without visible signs of it. Only it is the kind of change that concerns the lives of men rather than the landscape. The Dolomite country is not only exposed like other places to the general

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inroads of time and progress, but it has been decidedly affected by the war and its results.

When I first saw it the traces of war were still pretty evident, and they have not altogether vanished yet. One sequestered inn had known no boarders since it sheltered an Austrian staff, and an industrious pen might have compiled a history of that part of the front from the papers which littered its corners. One or two villages, which have been rebuilt since, were entirely in ruins. Hospices—some of these are derelict still—had been shattered, ransacked for materials or abandoned. On the hills there were gaping trenches and numerous dug-outs; in the valleys the remains of more dug-outs, dumps, and yards of the sodden felt that had served for coverings. Our new Italian guide-book, which seemed exhilarated by all these things, was always inviting us to notice the abundance of ‘cavalli di Frisia’. We innocently supposed them to be an equine breed akin to Frisian cattle, until it dawned on us that these ‘horses’ were *chevaux-de-frise*—barbed wire entanglements. Even the mountains, strange to say, gave an idea of the miles and miles of that accursed invention. On the Fedaia Pass one met wagons with teams of horses pulling slowly at what looked like loads of withered bracken and was, in fact, interminable rusted coils of wire. Behind Falzarego one might still encounter serried wire on the highest cols a year ago, and large bunches of it occasionally descended at the feet of astonished walkers through the Valparola. In those mountains we were startled one afternoon by what sounded like a demon orchestra. Discordant clangs, as of unholy gongs, bellowed and repeated themselves in sinister fashion round the wilderness. No cause was visible, until we presently came in sight of an Italian navy on a rock, who was hurling down sheets of armour-plating on to the rocks below him. The Italian Government has a tariff for all varieties of material that are brought in, and here and there gipsy-looking families have bivouacked on the hills and apparently lived by raking in what is left of the débris.

It was, indeed, an extraordinary warfare. Guns and lookouts were perched in incredible eyries along the cliffs—you may still spy them—and trenches were driven under the very glacier edge of the Marmolata, along whose crest the old frontier ran. The German pioneer battalion that stiffened the Austrians there has left its name cut in stone. Roads were made and a network of paths contrived in the high places—paths which

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are a confusion now and then to walkers in the mountains. For, sound as they look, they lead only to deserted emplacements. The moral, therefore, for walkers is more than ever to walk with a good map, and avoid all paths, however promising, that are not marked there with their destinations.

Those of the people who remained near the fighting-line will never forget the war. Most of them near the Austrian frontier—which took in the majority of the Dolomite villages and practically all I have mentioned—were evacuated into the Pustertal and other valleys behind. But a few, for one reason or another, still clung to their homes. They were women, of course; their men were with the Landsturm in the mountains, seldom seen, and watching out the months of winter in trenches and dug-outs in the snows. In their hitherto silent valley shells fell daily for two years. There was very little food. What they remember most, however, is not their own endurances but the ghastly irruption from time to time of hundreds of Russian prisoners, who were brought up here by the Austrians to work on the roads. These unfortunates were fed last, or not fed at all. I have been told they would beg and scramble for a bone; there was no suffering as bad as theirs, and the women, who were wrung with pity for them, do not care to speak of it. When I first went to Corvara the fences of their compound still stood in the valley, and there was a graveyard with unnamed crosses above. Few of those who worked and famished, day after day, under the cliffs of the Sella can have got away alive.

But, except for the singular mining feat which blew up the green top of the Col di Lana, war could never alter the face of this country; and its traces, insignificant as they are, will soon have disappeared altogether, leaving no reminder except one or two cemeteries, here and there, of those who fell in the mountains. The wooden crosses with their fading inscriptions will hardly stand for ever, but for as long as men are likely to remember there will be a memorial in these quiet resting-places. Many of those who lie there are far enough from home. One finds strange Polish and other names among the fallen Austrians. But they lie at least in noble places, in the last purity of air and earth, as in the little graveyard on the top of the Pordoi from which one seems to behold all the Dolomites. Still more will those who have seen it remember, for its utter seclusion and its beauty, the Austrian cemetery in the Fanés mountains. All that block of hills was once a stronghold of men and munitions. Except for a

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war road above and some vanishing débris on the summits nothing remains now but this company of crosses. As you come on it suddenly in the high stony valley, it is like an outpost of the nations of the dead. The rocks fall away to a stream and a little verdure, and there stand the crosses. Many of these soldiers died by an avalanche. They are commemorated in a tiny chapel which is made of pine-logs still covered with bark, but so shaped and adorned inside by skilful and careful hands that with all its roughness it is an exquisite thing. An absolute stillness and remoteness enfolds the valley.

The mountains are still unchanged. They have taken these lost lives into their peace, just as their strength absorbs and obliterates in the end all scars of warfare. Nowhere else could these appear so tiny or nature so permanent. The gentians star the ground with beauty, the rocks lift their walls and pinnacles behind it with nothing that shifts there except the unfailing play of light over their surfaces. In a long many-coloured file the cattle return across the pastures at evening. It is the same life still, and in essentials the people are the same, for their habits depend on nature. But the terms on which they live may be changed, and the marks of change that one sees in the Dolomites belong to this kind of alteration.

For anyone who knew the country before the war they would be summed up in the visible fact that the Dolomites have become Italian instead of Austrian territory. Railways, post-offices, and all official signs proclaim at once that you are in Italy. Those who, like myself, have never known the Dolomites otherwise will not be struck by this instant change; but if they have gone there more than once other differences will betray themselves. Small or trivial even as these may be, they are of the sort a visitor notices. The inns announce themselves more and more as 'albergo' or 'locanda' instead of 'Gasthof' or 'Gasthaus'; and with that goes a possible diminution in their German signs and legends—a change one would be sorry for if it were carried far, as it tends to substitute a precise Latin uniformity, than which nothing can be more uniform if it likes, for the old many-hued Tyrolese individualism. Much more decisive, because it has been everywhere compelled, is the change, recently, of all German place-names into their nearest Italian equivalents. The most pronounced examples of this really lie outside the Dolomites, in the upper valleys of the Adige and the Isarco. But inside them one finds Welsberg, for instance, converted

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into Monguelfo, while St. Ulrich resumes its Ladine name of Ortisei. Baedeker supplies all the variants, and perhaps will some day be the chief or sole reminder that this was once a mainly German-speaking country. Yet the most casual of tourists must notice that something has happened when he buys a picture postcard with the name of the scene blacked out, and gropes for its title among the erasures. With Latin logic this method has been applied to a time-honoured mountain name like the Schlern, which is hardly to be recognized now as 'Sciliar'.

What has happened is the kind of change that is apt to follow an alteration of frontiers. Pushing her boundary up to the Brenner at the end of the war, Italy acquired not merely the Trentino with the Italians of that 'Italia irredenta', but a country beyond them which had no wish to be redeemed at all, since it was inhabited by some 200,000 German-speaking Tyrolese. Not all of these, by any means, inhabit the Dolomites; more live no doubt in the valleys of the Adige and Isarco, where are the towns and most populous parts of the former South Tyrol. In the Dolomites themselves an irregular wavy line marked off the southern and northern peoples. Cortina and all to the south and east of it spoke Italian; so did the villages east of the Marmolata and everything, one might say, south of that mountain block down to the Piave. But north and west of this was a large region of the hills where the people spoke German, or else were Ladines, allied in feeling with the Tyrolese; and within this lies the nucleus of country which might be called the heart of the Dolomites for its central character.

In no case could the situation after the war have been very easy. The Allies had entirely forgotten about 'self-determination' when they cut the Tyrol in two. The Tyrolese, by the same irony of circumstances, were at the moment of passing under a new rule exceptionally conscious of having been an entity since medieval times; more conscious of it, probably, than they had ever been since Andreas Hofer took up arms against Napoleon. It was certainly difficult for Italy to deal with the problem she had created. She approached it with very liberal promises. The Italian friend who introduced us to the Dolomites assured me that her policy at first was much too easy-going. There were the Tyrolese, he said, clinging obstinately to their customs, making no secret of their feelings and as far as possible ignoring that they were now part of Italy. One would have to add in

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fairness that they had a good deal to digest: the loss of their markets, for instance, as well as of the large provincial autonomy they enjoyed under Austria.

This was half a dozen years ago, however; and if there was any question who was master the policy adopted since Signor Mussolini came into power can have left no doubts in their minds. The system, as he says, is to make them Italians: forcibly and promptly, with the energies of Fascism to supplement official action. The language, names, and education claimed attention first. This explains the words crossed out on the picture-cards, and the renaming of towns and villages throughout the German-speaking country. Besides the place-names a certain number of family names are changed; even the names, as well as inscriptions, on grave-stones being affected by this. In the schools the teaching is now given in Italian, and a strict inquisition is carried on with the object of making private lessons in German at home impossible—at least to more than one child at a time. This is more drastic than the former Austrian policy in the Trentino. The language and procedure in the Courts are Italian. Tyrolese who are charged with anything are kept in prison before they are tried; and as the Carabinieri are zealous and the law is slow, it is possible to spend a good deal of time there.

In the new territory,¹ which has—or had—fewer illiterates than any province of Italy, much less is said to be learned in the schools now. But there is one case, rather nearly related to a topic of this book, where Italian enterprise has achieved something really helpful. This is the Art School at Ortisei, in the Val Gardena, the home of carvers and toy-makers. Ortisei is a place where wooden statues for use in church may be seen in quantities, either in rough embryo or as finished works, lying out to dry. They are often quite good, usually much better than the toys, which degenerate into ugly grotesques that are supposed to meet the taste of tourists. It is a case where a finer taste might guide without destroying. At the school a distinguished Italian sculptor has supervised the work. One product of it was a beautiful little room shown at the Paris Exhibition of 1925: a characteristic interior enshrining some real works of art. Behind the carvers' work is that simple artistic sense, corresponding

¹ A province of Bolzano has been made now in the upper Adige which includes nearly all the Tyrolese. Education, however, has been so far still administered from Trento.

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to the tradition of their own works and ways, which these people have had for centuries. It is worth preserving and encouraging for its own sake; and the Ortisei school may help to do this, and save the craftsmanship from becoming emphatic or mechanical, as such work tends to become when it is turned into an industry.

Of all the industries in what was South Tyrol this carving industry in the Dolomites probably suffered least from the war. Nor did the resulting change of markets—a compulsory facing to the south instead of north—affect the mountains as much as the fruit-exporting valleys. What they felt most, no doubt, was the loss of the tourist traffic. After some lean years this has righted itself so far as the inflow of tourists is concerned. The hotels are pretty closely looked after and have to renew their licences every year, and it is well for them, perhaps, to have Signor Mussolini's portrait in prominence, for the pretexts on which they may be closed are very slight. In the Dolomites, however, I have not heard of any being thus disturbed. Of such hardships as occur there some are incidental to the routine of things; as when a lad is dispatched as a conscript far away, perhaps to Naples. This, in one case I knew of a Tyrolese boy who had never left his village before, was a pathetic experience; and these distant removals must be part of the same policy that brings Sicilian officials to govern the Tyrolese. There is more fussing over small things, and now and then police bullying may leave some helpless innocent half-starved for weeks in a verminous gaol; but there has been much less insecurity and alarm than has been felt in the populous valleys.

I believe that Italy will push on material development, though she has largely increased the expenses of the communes by multiplying officials. But whether it will be carried out by incoming Italians or by the people of the country has yet to be seen. Private initiative is controlled at present by regulations on building and on transfers of property. Farmers in the Dolomites, as elsewhere, must be affected by the change which has placed all the credit banks under Italian control. But from this side of the mountains I have not heard any of the stories of existences led on sufferance and liable to be harried or broken by frivolous charges, that come from the rest of what was once South Tyrol.

That the Tyrolese may be allowed to reconcile themselves—for all thoughts of independence or 'irredentism' must be gone by now; and

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that Italy may concede them equal justice, remembering that glorious example of old Rome which the poet celebrated:

*Haec est in gremio victos quae sola recepit
Matris, non dominae, ritu . . .*

this, one must hope, will be the issue from an unhappy situation.

But these pages remind me already of the novels which lure you down primrose paths and then abandon you suddenly with a taste of ashes. I find it, really, very hard to relate the Dolomites to politics or to anything that in political language may be called a 'situation'; and I should like to think some truth was mixed with this unwillingness. As a physical storm may break before their bluffs and headlands, so the acuter tension has circled to and fro in the great river valleys outside them. It would not be surprising if gloom of another sort had taken the place of that 'mountain gloom' which is curiously absent in their fastnesses; but a visitor, I fancy, will not notice it there. Whatever lot may have befallen the mountain folk, they meet it with their usually cheerful faces. They are, of course, less 'conscious', less intellectualized and generally sensitive, than the inhabitants of Bolzano or Merano. Changes of many kinds have certainly swept upon them. Yet I am not sure that those just described, even though they strike far into their lives, will be necessarily the most fundamental. Political rigour, persecution even, often leave essential traits unaltered. It might make more difference to the life of the peasants if shops increased and their daughters took to wearing silk stockings. Unless you know a little of their ancient ways this will certainly sound a flippant remark. But if you do know them, while there may be improvements to suggest, you still may wish that the people should remain as much of a piece with their mountain land as they are now.

And nature, being of a tangible and perhaps invincible strength in regions of this kind, will very likely arrange it so. It is among mountains that one apprehends her force of conservation. To a scientific eye, certainly, the Dolomites may present continuous and distorted freaks of change; just as the most casual must ask himself before some landslide of great pediments and cubes, when have these fallen? And to some eyes, dimly haunted by the picturesque, they may suggest a wild ecstasy of ruin. But I think that to the contemplative eye these hills, like others—and more

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than most others, because of the clear-cut visibility of their masses—suggest a permanent endurance. And because they have so much time, or do not care what time is, there is room for everything to get harmonized. The baroque churches in which the people delight adjust themselves to the forcible shapes of the mountains; the simplicities of an older art survive in existing traits of craftsmanship.

A stranger does not see the past so much as an instantaneous section of the present. But he sees this as one, framed by his experience, which reflects a real wholeness in its own way. The mountains and everything else—people, villages, and ‘country’—belong to each other because he has seen them in their unity. Hence arise those links and memories that often seem powerful just in proportion to their smallness: a gentian recalling wide grassy slopes and ranges of towering rock behind; a cottage-end or a cattle byre that seem, for some queer reason, suddenly to mean as much as the tallest of the mountains.



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